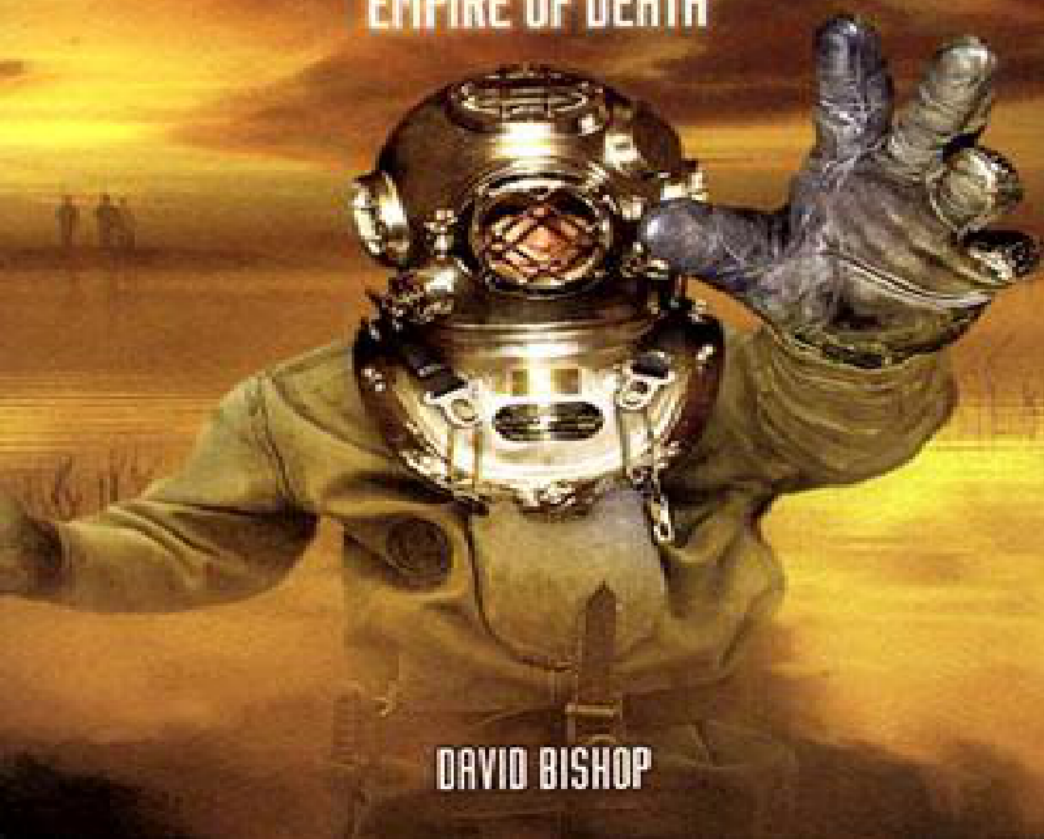


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EMPIRE OF DEATH



DAVID BISHOP

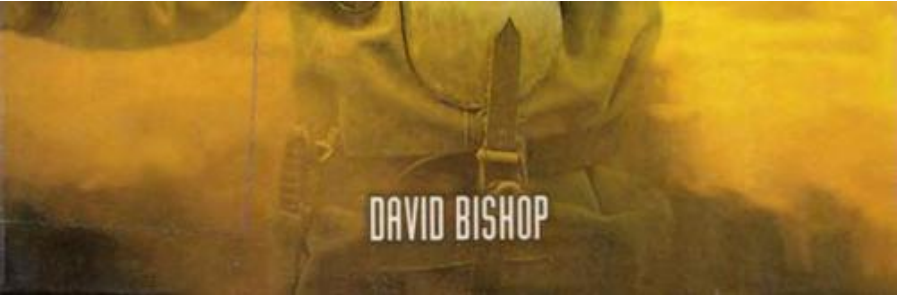
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WHO

EMPIRE OF DEATH





DAVID BISHOP



*In 1856, a boy discovers he can speak with the voices of the dead.
He grows up to become one of England's most celebrated spiritualists.*

In 1863 the British Empire is effectively without a leader.
Queen Victoria is inconsolable with grief following the death
of her beloved husband, Prince Albert. The monarch's
last hope is a secret séance.

The Doctor and Nyssa are also coming to terms with loss
following the death of Adric and Tegan's sudden departure.
Trying to visit the Great Exhibition of 1851, the time travellers
are shocked when a ghost appears in the TARDIS, beckoning
them to the Other Side.

What is hidden in a drowned valley guarded by the British Army?
Is there life after death and can it be reached by those still alive?
And why is the Doctor so terrified of facing his own ghosts?

This adventure features the Fifth Doctor and Nyssa.

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BOOKS

DOCTOR WHO

EMPIRE OF DEATH

DAVID BISHOP

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by Mackays of Chatham Cover printed by Belmont Press Ltd, Northampton *For Paul Cornell,*

whose chance remark inspired this story.

And for my grandfather

the real Charles Otto Vollmer

Prologue

1856

You hurry past the homes in the darkness, not wanting to be seen, not wishing to be recognised. The tiny bundle is still warm, huddled in black cloth, moist at the edges. The heat of the day is lifting now but the night is still close around you, the sweet and sickly stench of sap drying thick and heavy in the air You feel a trickle of sweat slip beneath your collar Ahead, the sound of water is quieter than usual Summer has dried the land and the rivers, but for that you are thankful It means you can bury the bundle where none will find it You claw down into the soil, pulling aside stones

and gravel Then you push the desperate mass into the earth and cover it over burying yourself with it in some small way It is over you tell yourself No one ever need know what you have done. But you know this is a lie...

The three brothers ran along the narrow dirt path, bare feet slapping against the pounded earth. They called to each other, familiar insults and taunts thrown between the siblings.

Josiah was the oldest, at fourteen already working full time in the cotton mills. He was fast growing into a man, his shoulders broadening, long hours of intense manual labour developing muscular bulges across his arms and chest. The faintest trace of stubble was becoming apparent on his chin, something of which he was inordinately proud, considering it a sign of impending manhood. He led the others, strong legs enabling him to outpace them.

John was next, just a year younger than Josiah. Unlike the rest of the family, he had black hair - a throwback to his mother's mother. He was lean and lithe, still dividing his time between school and the mills, still able to play truant on rare occasions like today when Josiah had an afternoon off work.

John could almost keep pace with his elder brother, the two of them fiercely competitive in almost every activity.

Last was James, still only eight and the weakling of the family. He was struggling to keep his siblings in sight, despite running as fast as he could. All his life had been spent pursuing John and Josiah, trying to emulate them. James had once asked his mother why he didn't have any brothers or sisters closer in age to him. She sent him to bed without supper, before crying herself to sleep. James knew better than to broach the subject again. He always meant to ask his brothers but they were too busy being boys to care much about his curious nature. When pressed, they would say ignorance was better than a thrashing.

James rounded a bend in the track and slowed to a halt.

He could still hear his brothers but they were now out of sight altogether. The boy looked around him, wondering why they had decided to come here for an afternoon swim. There were plenty of good places below the mills where you could dry yourself on warm stones in the sun without being seen by others. Why come upstream past Dundaff? The answer was simple, he knew - because it was forbidden, especially now work had begun on the great dam. James was still a boy but he knew enough to keep his eyes and ears open

when adults talked in hushed voices. Being so small his presence often passed unnoticed, or else the grown-ups thought he wouldn't understand and paid him no mind. Late at night, when his brothers were asleep, James would lie awake in his hurlie bed and listen to his parents talking. From all he had heard, the area north of Dundaff Linn was beset by some curse. The dead did not rest easy in their graves and the residents had taken to burying their loved ones elsewhere, lest the departed came back to haunt them. At least one man was believed to have taken his own life after his late wife's spirit reappeared each night in their marital bed.

Not all believed in the power of this curse, but eventually most decent families shifted downstream to New Lanark or moved away altogether. Only those too poor to move remained above the falls, scratching out a meagre existence.

When news emerged a dam was to be constructed near Dundaff Linn, flooding the valley above that point, the remaining residents were pleased to be relocated, grateful to escape such a moribund and unhappy hamlet. When James heard his brothers planning to swim in this forbidden place, he had invited himself along, eager to witness the curse for himself. The boy resumed running, calling ahead for his brothers to slow down.

He found them quarter of a mile further upstream, hiding behind a tall oak. They motioned him to silence, pointing ahead to where the forest began thinning out. Two men in tweed suits were puffing on pipes, mopping their brows with handkerchiefs. One had a handsome brown and ginger beard, while the other's face was adorned with two well-sculpted sideburns. Each looked well fed, the cut of their suits proving them to be gentlemen of no small means.

James crept up to be beside his brothers. 'Who are they?' He knew everyone who lived in their village by sight, if not by name, but these men were strangers to his eyes.

'The architects, I think,' Josiah whispered. 'In the mill I heard talk about two men arriving today to check progress on the dam. It's running behind schedule.'

'Are they from Glasgow? I've never met anyone from Glasgow.'

John clamped a grubby hand over his younger brother's mouth. 'Hush, you! Keep your questions to yourself,' John hissed. 'They'll go back to work soon and we can slip past them.'

Eventually the men tapped out their pipes on a damp patch of grass and got to their feet. After consulting a map, they began walking down the dirt path towards the brothers.

Josiah and John slowly crept around the outside of the large oak, always keeping it between them and the two men. John kept a firm grip on his younger brother to stop the boy revealing their presence. As the strangers passed, James overheard part of their conversation.

'I find the situation most perplexing. Why can't we simply bring in labourers from the surrounding villages and farms?'

the bearded man asked.

'Mr Burness, you may not choose to believe in idle gossip and superstition but the people of this area do,' the other man replied. 'Few will visit this area, let alone work in it for any length of time. That was why my company was able to obtain the land from Lord Braxfield so cheaply. If we wish to continue, we will have to bring in labour from further afield.'

'But this is most unsatisfactory! I can ill afford to pay for such workers, let alone provide them with lodgings!'

'Perhaps there is another way. In the meantime, do not despair - we shall assess the work to date and then...'

By now the two gentlemen had long passed the brothers and James was straining to hear what was being said. Josiah tugged on the coarse material of James's shirt. 'Are you coming or not, Tiny?'

James hated that nickname. He turned to kick at his brother's ankles but Josiah and John were already running on towards Corra Linn, away from the two strangers. James set off in pursuit, determined not to be left behind again. The waterfall was a spectacular sight, a raging mass crashing down upon the rocks below. Bright sunshine sparkled off the torrent, the arc of a rainbow visible in the spray. Beneath the falls the river spread out into a wider, shallower pool before rounding a bend in its path and accelerating again into a narrower channel.

James was disappointed. He could see no evidence of a curse, no ghosts striding the riverbank. True, the falls were higher than any he had seen, but the farthest he had been from home was a few miles to Lanark for Lanimer's Day, so he did not have much basis for comparison. Perhaps the architects had been right, all the gossip was just superstition.

And yet - the air was heavy and sickly of smell, like honey about to burn over a fire. The thunderous crashing of the water assaulted the ears, making it hard to think. James felt drawn to the water and repelled by it at the same time.

His brothers seemed to share this uneasiness. It was John who broke their silence, always the most impetuous. He pulled his shirt over his head and cast it aside, slipping out of his shorts at the same time. The lad ventured to the edge of the riverbank, peering into the water below. 'Looks safe to me,' he announced and flung himself into the air. With little grace he plunged into the river, a sheet of water flying backwards from his impact. A moment later, John broke the surface and waved at his brothers. 'Come on! Last one in has to shine our Sunday shoes for a month!'

Josiah was already peeling off his clothes. Before James was even out of his shirt the eldest of the trio was in the water, swimming towards the turbulence beneath the falls.

James resigned himself to another month of polishing three pairs of leather shoes and continued carefully shedding his clothes. Having lost the race, he saw no point in going home with crumpled, grass-stained garments that would only bring harsh questions from his stern-faced mother.

The boy looked up at the waterfall. Corra Linn was almost as high as the mill buildings at New Lanark, but much more spectacular. James clambered down to the water's edge and slipped into the river. The surface had been warmed by the sun but cold reached up from the depths, chilling James's feet and legs. He kicked some life back into them and began paddling towards John and Josiah.

The two elder brothers were playing on the wide slabs of stone beneath the falls, flinging themselves through the sheets of water cascading into the river. 'Come on, Tiny!'

John shouted as he leapt into the air. James paddled harder, careful to keep his chin in the air so the water did not cover his face. It was slow progress across the wide pool and he was grateful to reach the edge of the turbulence, as his legs and arms were getting tired. Josiah swam out to meet him, slicing through the water with deft, precise movements.

'Are you sure you should be out this far?' Josiah asked, pushing damp hair away from his eyes.

James just nodded, smiling to reassure Josiah. He was going to say something but was distracted by that smell again, a cloying odour that did not belong in this place.

'All right, but if you start getting tired or need help, just give me a shout.'

James nodded again. He wanted to ask Josiah about the stench but couldn't seem to get the words out. Josiah was turning round in slow circles, his face dipping down into the water. After a few seconds he pulled it back up again for air.

'What are you doing?' John called from behind the waterfall.

'Looking for gold coins,' Josiah replied. 'Visitors used to throw sovereigns over the falls for luck. If we find any, we can keep them - nobody would know.'

That was enough for John, who joined the search eagerly.

Josiah taught James how to open his eyes underwater, so he could help them look for this treasure. John announced that whoever found a sovereign had to share it with the others, but James knew that would not be true if it was John who discovered a coin first.

The youngest boy soon tired of the search and began paddling back towards the riverbank. Along the way he stopped several times to peer down into the gloomy, churning waters but saw nothing to excite any interest. Just as James was about to get out, he stopped for one last look. There, at the edge of the water, the turbulence from the falls was less pronounced. In the stiller waters a glint of light caught his eye. James turned back to his brothers but only John had his head above water. If this was a sovereign, James did not feel like sharing it.

Taking a deep breath, James dived down into the water.

He forced open his eyes, despite the shock of cold liquid against them. Yes, something was glinting down here! He kicked harder, pushing himself further down. He reached forwards, fingers clawing at the glinting point of light on the riverbed. But as he got closer James realised this was no discarded coin. He felt something tugging him closer to the light, urging him ever nearer...

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal - by Nyssa of Traken:

I have begun writing this as a way of recording my observations while

travelling aboard the TARDIS, to help order my thoughts and analysis of these experiences. My father always told me an able scientist needs to be an impartial observer when conducting experiments and I have decided to see whether such an approach will help me attain an understanding of the worlds I visit beyond the purely scientific. I am aware, of course, that no one person can be an impartial observer of their own life. My recording and subsequent analysis of any and all experiences will be inevitably coloured by my own perceptions and involvement. I cannot guarantee to be a reliable narrator of events, nor even claim to possess a full understanding of them. (My travels with the Doctor thus far have shown even he frequently finds the ordering of experience and reality a frustrating endeavour.) Nevertheless, I am determined to do my best.

There is another reason for keeping this journal, I must confess - I am lonely. Since joining the TARDIS, this vast craft housed within a small outer shell has been filled with the sound of voices and arguments, laughter and even tears. But now it is all too empty. One of my travelling companions is dead, killed trying to prevent a cataclysm that proved to be historical fact. Adric's sacrifice seems to have been without reason or positive effect, making his loss all the more haunting. I keep expecting him to come running around a corner, some notation clutched in his hand, those eager eyes sparkling in anticipation of sharing the idea with the Doctor or myself. He was a loud, boisterous presence who could be trying, petulant and precocious - but he was my friend, all the same. I miss him more than I ever thought possible, perhaps because he was taken from us so abruptly, so unexpectedly. I can find no logic or purpose behind his passing, but I fervently believe his memory will always be with me - for good and for ill. Just as I was coming to terms with that loss, Tegan has also gone, back in her own time and space. After being a quartet for so long, it is strange to travel with just the Doctor for company. We can have many fascinating scientific discussions - his depth and range of knowledge is the accumulation of several lifetimes - but I must confess to finding it difficult to relax in his company. At least, not like I could with Tegan. She was the elder sister I never had, a willing listener when I was troubled. We often shared our fears, finding each other a comfort when Adric became too trying to be near. I know one should not speak ill of the dead, but that boy could be quite annoying. He was close in age to me but surprisingly lacking in maturity. (Or perhaps I am mature beyond my years? Of this I am hardly the best judge, so it should remain as mere speculation.) Perhaps my upbringing was to blame for the differences between us. I was raised by my father, Tremas. He tried to instil in me what he

considered the best qualities of our people - patience, tolerance, inquisitiveness, a wish for harmony and tranquillity. Adric would best typify only one of those qualities, I think. But he had others to recommend him, such as loyalty and a boundless enthusiasm. He certainly had a capacity to irritate Tegan beyond what she could stand, but then they were too much alike. They were both insecure about themselves and their role within the TARDIS. Perhaps she saw a younger, more gauche version of herself in him?

But she is gone now and I can no longer ask her. Even if I could, I doubt Tegan would agree with my assessment. Still, it would almost be worth asking, just to see the look on her face. But all of this is a digression.

There was a third reason that prompted the beginning of this journal, an event earlier today that I must record and try to make sense of. Today is a relative term while travelling in the TARDIS. When you journey through time and space, the passing of a day is notional at best. That is not to say time stands still within these walls. All the passengers continue to age at whatever rate is normal for their kind. If I were still on Traken, today would be what Tegan called my birthday - the anniversary of the day I was born. For her people such events were to be celebrated, often with the giving of gifts.

Before her abrupt departure, she had even talked about organising an event for me.

Instead, today simply marks the passage of more time with just the Doctor for company. He reminds me in some small ways of my father, but our relationship is very different. It is hard to imagine the Doctor spontaneously embracing me as a gesture of affection. He is too self-conscious for that, too aware of the role he feels he must play. He keeps me at arm's length, more so since the loss of Adric, almost as if he were afraid of becoming too emotionally attached to me.

How many others have travelled with him in the TARDIS, I wonder? How many times has he had to say goodbye or to grieve for the loss of a friend? The Doctor's kind are able to regenerate their bodies, taking on a new physical form and personality while retaining all their memories and experience.

In effect, he can live for hundreds, even thousands of years as we measured them on Traken. By comparison the lifespan of his companions must seem terribly brief and ephemeral to him. Perhaps it is no wonder he finds it difficult to become close. The loss of a loved

one can be emotionally shattering.

What must it be like to spend your lives with people, knowing they are doomed to die long before you? Perhaps even to know the manner and moment of their death? Such knowledge must be a terrible burden. I wonder if the Doctor has such knowledge about my future life? Would he share it with me if I asked? I doubt it.

If my father were here, he would suggest that all of this speculation was a form of emotional transference - a rationalisation for my reluctance to become emotionally involved. And perhaps he would be right. I must admit to myself I am lonely and take steps to do something about that loneliness. Unlike Tegan, I cannot go home again. Traken was destroyed by a dark field of entropy unleashed by the same individual who took my father's life. I suppose I could ask the Doctor to take me back to the planet at a time before its destruction, but there seems little point now. Traken is as dead to me now as my father. With Adric dead and Tegan gone, I have never been more alone. At least that was what I believed - until the ghost appeared...

It was John who first noticed the disappearance of James.

'Where did he go? Where is he?' John called to his elder brother. Both lads had seen the younger boy swimming back to where their clothes were discarded on the riverbank. All three shirts were still there. So where was their brother?

'James, if you're hiding in the bushes, come out now and I won't tan your hide myself!' Josiah called out. 'James?'

'Josiah, you don't think he...' John's words trailed off, worried that if he gave voice to what he was thinking it might come true.

The eldest brother was biting his bottom lip, concern etched into his expression. 'There are strong undercurrents, even in this stretch. Sometimes the stones get shifted. He could be trapped underwater, unable to get back to the surface...'

John could feel a wave of panic rising in his stomach, a sickening hollowness. 'Dad will kill us if anything happens to James!'

Josiah had already reached the same conclusion. 'Come on!' He began swimming as fast as he could towards the riverbank, his arms thrashing through the water. John followed. Once near the edge, they began diving down to the bottom of the river, straining to spot their

brother through the silt and debris. After a few seconds John resurfaced, took a deeper breath and dived once more. The pair of them dived repeatedly without success.

Eventually John gave up, his teeth chattering, his breath coming in brief gasps. 'It's no use, it's no use,' he cried. 'We should never have come here. This place, it is cursed!'

'Maybe he ran home as a joke,' Josiah replied. 'Maybe the current carried him downstream. He's probably walking back up the path now to get his shirt.'

John shook his head. 'You don't believe that any more than I do!

Josiah sneered at his brother. 'Stop snivelling! If we can't find James, we can't go home - you understand that, don't you?'

John nodded helplessly, then twitched involuntarily. 'What was that?'

'What?' Josiah demanded.

'Something touched my foot - I felt it!' John peered down into the shallows.

Josiah was already diving down past his brother's legs.

John hastily sucked in a deep breath of air and followed. For a few seconds he could see nothing. Then, between some rocks at the edge of the river, John thought he could see a hand reaching out. Josiah motioned for John to help him.

They grasped at the twitching fingers, getting a firm grip on the limb. Together they pulled and tugged with all their might.

Just as John thought his lungs would burst, the rocks around the arm began to fall away. The two brothers were able to swim upwards, still holding on to the convulsing hand.

The pair broke the surface, followed a second after by James, all three of them panting and spitting out mouthfuls of river water. John struggled to keep hold of his younger brother, the boy flailing at him with clenched fists. Strange, guttural sounds were issuing from James's snarling mouth, inarticulate in word and phrase but full of threat.

'For the love of God, stop it!' Josiah commanded, slapping James across the face. The boy reacted with shock, his eyes ablaze with

anger. Then the pupils rolled back behind his eyelids and James was unconscious, his body becoming a dead weight in the water.

'Josiah! What have you done?' John demanded. The sun had disappeared behind the high hills and twilight was fast drawing in, bringing a sudden drop in temperature.

'Help me get him to the riverbank,' Josiah commanded.

Together they got James to the water's edge. John clambered out first and pulled the boy up and out by one arm.

Josiah joined him and they began slapping James on the face, trying to awaken their brother.

John could feel panic rising within himself again, a sick dread clawing at his insides. What would they do if James was dead? How would they explain to their parents? The youngest sibling was their father's favourite, the baby of the family. John had always been jealous of the attention his younger brother received and took any opportunity to exact that frustration on James. Now he looked down at the boy's ashen, lifeless face and wished he could take it all back.

The young boy's eyes blinked and then opened fully as James breathed in at last. 'I saw him, I talked to him,' he whispered.

'Who?' Josiah asked.

'Grandfather. He was there to welcome me. I saw him!'

'James, what are you talking about? Grandfather is dead, he has been for years. You can't have -'

'You're wrong. He was waiting there for me. He reached out and took my hand. He was going to be my guide.'

'Guide? To where?'

James sat upright, his breathing quicker now. 'The Other Side. The next life. I saw him, he was there.'

'James, you're not making any sense!'

'He told me you wouldn't understand, wouldn't believe me.'

But it's true, all of it.' James reached a shaking hand up to the side of his head. can hear them talking in here. All those who have passed

over.'

'Passed over?' John asked, not understanding any of this.

James just nodded. 'They want me to speak for them, to spread the word. Then, when the time is right, I have to go back!

'Go back?'

'To the Other Side!'

Josiah grabbed James by the shoulders and began to shake him violently. 'James, will you shut up! You can't talk about things like this, you'll get us all in trouble!'

James smiled at his brothers. 'If only you could see what I have - you would understand. You would know. This, all of this - ' the boy glanced around himself at the falls, the trees on the hillsides - 'it's just one world. There is another world beyond this.'

Josiah lashed out, slapping James across the face. He was about to strike his brother again but John prevented him.

'Josiah, no! Leave him!'

James began coughing. 'I - I - ' The boy collapsed sideways, silt-laden water dribbling from the side of his mouth.

Josiah bent over James but could not revive the boy. 'It's no use. He's gone again.' Josiah muttered. He stood up and began pulling on his clothes. 'I'm going to get Dr Kirkhope -

maybe he can find what's wrong with James.'

'What about me? What do I do?' John cried.

'Stay with him. Don't let him out of your sight.' Josiah began running the long track back to the village, his footfalls soon lost in the sounds of the surrounding trees.

John pressed an ear against James's chest. He could hear the faintest of rattles inside, along with an unsteady thumping noise. Good, James was still alive. That was something. But what had he been babbling about? John struggled to remember his grandfather, a kindly old gentleman who had only visited them once before dying. Why was James talking as if they had just spoken? It couldn't be right, what the boy was saying - could it? John realised he was shivering and pulled

on his shirt, the fabric clinging to the dampness on his back. It would be dark soon and they had already stayed out far too long for their father's liking. A sound thrashing awaited them when they got home. But that was the least of John's worries.

He looked into the water from where they had rescued James. What had happened down there? James should be dead, by rights. He had been under the water far too long.

John had seen the pasty white and blue faces of drowning victims before. But his brother was still alive. How was such a thing possible?

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: It all began soon after the Doctor asked where we should go next, as if uncertain of his own judgement. I mentioned that we had been trying to reach something called the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Doctor nodded happily and began resetting the controls. He said this event was among the crowning achievements of Victorian Britain, bringing together a fantastic range of displays and oddities from around the globe. I still wasn't sure why he wanted to show this spectacle to me but did not challenge his enthusiasm. After recent events, it was good to see him smile again. But the happiness soon faded from his face.

The TARDIS is the most complex device I have ever encountered. It maintains thousands of different functions at any given moment and, seemingly with little effort, is able to transcend time and space. For all that ability, it is also a temperamental creation and one of which the Doctor seems to have a limited mastery. His attitude to this marvellous blue box of tricks is like that of a resident who has lived in the same house for too long. They no longer seem to notice the cracks in the plaster, the dust in the corners, the slow and remorseless decline going on around them. They live with a home for so long, they lose the sense of perspective that a fresh occupant brings, simply settling for the way things are.

For some time I had been urging the Doctor to consider making some, or indeed any, of the repairs the TARDIS

requires. Rare is the trip that does not trigger some warning as another circuit cries in distress at its neglect. Of course, not all such alarms are caused by internal matters. The TARDIS travels through the space-time continuum and is sensitive to weaknesses and attacks upon that delicate balance. These are not uncommon, so it came as little surprise when a flashing red light and a warning chime soon accompanied the Doctor's efforts to pilot us back to nineteenth-

century London on the planet Earth. We had been in transit but a few seconds when the Doctor's brow furrowed with concern and puzzlement.

When questioned, he said the TARDIS was detecting a weakness in the continuum not far from our destination. Not far in terms of space or of time? I joined him at the vessel's control console, having become adept at interpreting the many displays and readouts. Both, the Doctor replied. Still, he thought it was nothing to worry about just yet. We could always come back and address it later. I found myself protesting against this attitude. All too often the Doctor was guilty of putting off until tomorrow what he should have done long ago. Tomorrow never comes in a time machine, I reminded him.

His reply was drowned out by the wailing of a louder and more urgent alarm, a mechanical cry for help. It was a collision warning. The Doctor tried to alter course while I monitored the approach of the other vessel. No matter how the Doctor tried to avoid the onrushing danger, the collision kept drawing closer. Finally the Doctor abandoned his efforts altogether and shouted for me to brace against the imminent impact.

Suddenly, everything stopped - the central column of the console ceased rising and falling, the various alarms and klaxons fell silent, the constant background humming that accompanies the TARDIS at all times was absent. In their place was an eerie silence and something else. The air was thick with a sickly sweet smell like the succulent flowers that grew in the grove on Traken, petals falling across the calcified remnants of long-dead evil. I used to tend a creature in that grove and always associate its presence with such scents, a stench that turns the stomach with its overpowering sweetness.

The Doctor asked if I was all right, to which I just nodded.

He couldn't tell me what had happened as the TARDIS

instruments were locked in place, frozen at the moment of impact. I pointed out this was impossible and he glumly agreed.

As for what happened next, I will attempt to give a more complete record, including all our spoken words as I remember then. I feel these will be important in the days to come. I saw the ghost first. It was standing in a corner of the control room, quite meek and unassuming, behind the Doctor's back. The phantom smiled at me and winked before clearing its throat. The Doctor looked at me for reassurance

before slowly turning around to face the ghost. 'Hello, Adric.

We thought you were dead.'

'I am,' the ghost replied matter-of-factly 'But you of all people should know that's just a beginning, Doctor - not the end.'

Dr Robert Kirkhope kept a secret locked tightly within his heart. On occasion, when the need arose, he was willing to kill babies. He gained no pleasure from this murderous activity. Indeed, he was resigned to the fact that it would condemn him to an eternal damnation in hell, suffering all the torments and horrors from which he tried to deliver unwilling mothers when they asked. The physician had long since stopped looking at his gaunt face in the mirror, lest his tired eyes bear witness to what he had done in the name of mercy.

It was many a winter since his shadow had darkened the doorstep of any church.

For twelve years Kirkhope had served the community of New Lanark, seeing to the medical needs of more than a thousand people housed in this remote village on the banks of the River Clyde. He did the best he could by those people with the medicines and knowledge he had available. He nursed people through sickness, helped new children be born into the community and tended to the dying. It was a terrible burden to know you would soon be standing over the graveside of someone you know and have to share that knowledge with them, to pass sentence like some remorseless magistrate.

But that was nothing compared to killing a child. The first had been just a week after he arrived. One of the mill workers had approached him, an unmarried girl of fifteen summers.

She shyly confessed to having been with a man and letting him have his way with her after he said he loved her. Now she was worried that something was wrong, her monthly bleeding had stopped and she thought perhaps the doctor could help? She could not have a child without having a husband first, not here in such a close-knit community. She might be able to hide her condition for a few months but soon everyone would know.

Kirkhope had asked about the father, of course. The girl had misunderstood. She said it wasn't her father - it was her uncle who done it. He was just visiting the village and he had seemed very nice and... She had heard tell about what happened when members of the same family had knowledge of each other. So she had to get rid of the

baby, if there was a baby. Maybe she just imagined the whole thing, maybe it would be all right if she just ignored it? The doctor had managed to quell his outrage at the circumstances in which this poor girl found herself and agreed he would help.

That had been the first and that was always the one Kirkhope most remembered. There had been so much blood and then the tiny creature was in his hands, quite dead but still with its own minute fingers curled up into the littlest of fists. He had become an abortionist but his own conscience was clear. He did what he did but only when the circumstances demanded it. Fortunately, they were rare but when another case arose the women of the village knew to whom to turn.

When the knock came at his door that evening in 1856, Kirkhope feared the worst. It was almost a relief when he saw the stricken face of young Josiah Lees outside in the gloaming. 'Please, Doctor, you must come quickly! It's my youngest brother James, he's - well, you must come. Please!'

The doctor nodded and fetched his long black coat from a hook on the wall, before taking the medical bag from atop the nearby dresser. By the time he reopened the front door, the Lees lad was already running towards the upstream edge of the settlement. Kirkhope strode briskly after him, buttoning the coat against the chill night air. At least he would not have to kill another baby tonight.

* * *

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal.

'Do you know what is the worst thing about being a ghost?'

Adric asked.

The Doctor shook his head. Our former travelling companion turned to me with the same question.

'I don't know,' I replied truthfully. I've never been dead.'

'I should have thought it was obvious,' Adric said truculently. 'Leaving behind all of those still living. But death does have its compensations. I can talk with Varsh whenever I want and meet others who have passed over. Your father, Nyssa - I've had some fascinating conversations with Tremas since, well, you know...'

'How do we know you're telling the truth?' the Doctor asked.

The ghost had to think about that. 'Analyse me. I'll release the console and you can use the instruments to tell you whether I'm real or not.'

'An excellent suggestion!' the Doctor replied. 'Nyssa, would you be kind enough to assist me?'

'Of course, Doctor,' I said. We began running a series of scans to determine the nature of this apparition. I could not help giving voice to my doubts. 'Doctor - what do you think that thing is?'

'I'm not sure. That's what worries me,' he whispered.

'Ghosts are mentioned in cultures across the galaxy.

Explanations for their existence are many - displaced psychic energy, mental projection, even delusional wish fulfilment. But how could such an entity walk into the TARDIS while it is in flight, let alone disable and enable all the instruments like this? That should be impossible.'

I studied the sensor displays before me. 'According to these readings there are three beings in this room - you, me and a teenage Alzarian male. The TARDIS recognises him as being Adric, his physical manifestation matches exactly.'

'Hmm,' the Doctor mused. 'Perhaps some residual effect from our encounter with the Xeraphin - you mentioned seeing a vision of Adric...'

'Yes, but that was an obvious illusion plucked from the surface memories of Tegan and myself. This seems more...

convincing.'

The Doctor and I concluded our tests but could find nothing to disprove the ghost was the spirit of Adric, as it claimed.

'Well?' the phantom asked, a smug smile of self-satisfaction evident on its features. Real or not, the ghost certainly displayed several of Adric's less likeable traits.

'The TARDIS seems to think you are what you claim to be,'

the Doctor replied. 'Let's say we also believe in you, for the moment. Why have you come here?'

'To extend an invitation. A beckoning, if you like.'

'To what?' I asked.

'We need your help. I was chosen as your spirit guide for what is to come.'

'Why should we believe you?'

The ghost began walking towards the central console. 'To have belief, you must first have faith.'

'Faith is the province of theologians and the religious. I believe in science,' the Doctor replied, watching as Adric walked through the console like a - well, like a ghost.

'Science tells you I am real and yet you are still not sure.

Where is your belief now, Doctor?' Adric asked. He paused on the far side of the console room. 'Come to the Other Side -

see for yourself. Then, perhaps, you will believe.' The apparition walked on through the wall of roundels and was gone.

The central rotor began rising and falling again as the remaining instruments surged back into life, their functions restored. After a few seconds the lingering, sickly sweet smell was gone too, leaving just the Doctor and me to ponder the visitation.

'Well, Doctor? Was that Adric or not?'

'I wish I knew,' he admitted. 'Shall we take up his invitation?'

'I want to believe it's true. The chance to see my father again...' My voice choked and I had to stop speaking, my feelings overwhelming me.

The Doctor nodded his understanding. He began resetting the TARDIS controls. 'We encountered the apparition while observing that weakness in the continuum. Therefore it is logical to assume the two are in some way linked. I'll attempt to isolate the nearest space/time co-ordinates to the phenomena and see where that leads us.'

He set about the task while I contemplated the affection in Adric's eyes. It reminded me so strongly of my dead father.

Traken was a reserved culture where emotional displays were frowned upon, where duty and propriety held sway over the heart. But Tremas had never been afraid to show how he felt - wearing his heart on his

sleeve, that was how Tegan once described such behaviour. A curious expression, but an apt summation at the same time. If anything I am more like the Doctor than my father, keeping my emotions in check, always holding back.

Having lost so much - my family, my friends, my home world - that involuntary self-control has only become stronger.

The less I feel about something or someone, the less it can hurt when they are lost to me. I find myself building walls around my hurts to protect myself. But am I only imprisoning myself with the pain?

'Nyssa? Nyssa, are you feeling all right?' I realised the Doctor was talking to me, his hands stopped above the central console. 'We don't have to do this if you don't want to.'

'No, it's better that we do,' I said. 'Some things must be faced, no matter how much we might want to turn away.' The Doctor just nodded and set the TARDIS in motion. So began our strangest journey together.

Dr Kirkhope had briefly assessed the Lees boy on the riverbank but could find no obvious physical ailment. With night fast drawing in, he had the two older brothers carry their sibling back to his examining room in the village. Kirkhope then sent the lads to fetch their parents, giving him a chance to study the boy's condition.

Plainly young James had been close to drowning after some swimming accident. The boy had twice coughed up water on the journey and babbled in a tongue unfamiliar to the physician. The brothers claimed James was trapped underwater for several minutes, so by rights he should be dead. But his circulation was strong and his breathing steady, if shallow. Kirkhope found the eyes most disturbing. The pupils were like pinpricks, as if they had been exposed to a blinding light. But that was hardly possible at the bottom of the Clyde.

The doctor knew he was out of his depth but continued to make notes, the examination room illuminated by tallow candles. He decided to see if he could get any sense from the child. 'James, can you hear me? It's Dr Kirkhope. Do you remember me? I treated you last winter for a chest infection...'

James sat bolt upright and stared at the physician, startling him. The boy opened and closed his mouth soundlessly, as if trying to speak but unable to emit the words. His hands rapped on the wood of the examination bench, staccato rhythms that made no sense to Kirkhope's

ears. Then the words came tumbling forth from the boy, but spoken in the voice of another - the voice of a woman.

'Robert? Is that you, Robert?'

The doctor dropped his pencil in shock. 'Morag?' He could feel goose pimples creeping across his skin as the hairs on the back of his neck stood up. A pungent, sweet and sickly odour assaulted his nostrils. Kirkhope's eyes darted around the room, searching for the source of this impossible voice.

His wife had died during childbirth a decade ago, after falling pregnant long past her fortieth year. He had begged her not to carry the baby full term but she would not listen. To her the infant was a blessing from on high, proof their union had been recognised at last. Morag had long been a fervent churchgoer, unlike her husband. He knew the pregnancy would almost certainly kill his wife but could not persuade her of this truth. When she died, her sad eyes had been filled with questions he could not answer. Now she was calling to him again.

'Why, Robert? Why did you do it?'

The boy's lips were moving but the voice was that of Morag, the distinctive Highland accent with which he had fallen in love decades before. The doctor forced himself to put disbelief aside and answer her questions.

'What, my love? Why did I do what?'

'Why did you kill all those babies?'

Kirkhope was rocked back on his heels. This was impossible, the boy could not know, could not understand anything about this secret!

'I've seen the babies, you know. Their brittle bones, eyes that will never see - their tiny lives taken by you. How could you, Robert?'

'Please, Morag -'

'You swore all you ever wanted was a baby, yet you took the unborn children from other women. You murdered them, Robert - why?'

'Please, Morag - you don't understand... '

'Make me understand. You buried their bodies but in doing so you

have created a horror beyond imagining, sown the seeds of our destruction. How you could do that?'

Tears streamed down the physician's face as he began to sob. 'Please, my darling, you don't know what I went through, the things I had to do - I had no choice.'

'There's always a choice, my love.'

'I wanted a family more than anything in the world, but it came too late -'

'It was a blessing, Robert.'

'No! No! Damn you, woman, why wouldn't you listen?

You'd still be alive if only you had listened to me!' Kirkhope could feel the rage welling up inside him, the same impotent fury that had haunted him all these years. 'For the love of Christ, I did nothing wrong!'

'I see now,' the boy said, his lips mouthing the words as Morag's sing-song voice echoed from within him. 'God was punishing us.'

'No, it's not true!'

'He was punishing us for what you'd done, all the lives you stole.'

'No, woman, you're wrong!'

'He took me from you, just as you took those babies from their mothers.'

'No, please...' Kirkhope began flailing at James with his fists, beating them against the child's chest. 'Please, don't say that...'

'Goodbye, Robert.'

'No, no, no!' Kirkhope screamed, but the boy had fallen silent again. The physician shook him by the shoulders but it was no use. The dead voice was stilled once more. Kirkhope wept over the boy, scarcely able to hold himself upright. He stayed like that for minutes, until the arrival of James's parents pulled him back to the present. The doctor wiped his face clean with a damp cloth and composed himself before letting them inside.

Martha Lees threw herself at the boy, embracing him tightly but

getting no response. Mr Lees stood back, a cap clutched in nervous hands, watching and waiting. Kirkhope drew himself up to his full height and tried to explain what was wrong with James. 'Your boy seems to be in shock. As I understand it he was trapped underwater in the river for several minutes. In such cases where the drowned person survives, their reason can be impaired. The brain is starved of air, you see...'

'Are you saying our boy will be simple?' Mr Lees asked.

'To be perfectly honest, I'm not certain. He has spoken since I examined him but he made no sense,' Kirkhope replied, deciding discretion was better than the whole truth.

'What do you mean, made no sense - what did he say?'

the father demanded.

'Mam, is that you?' James asked quietly. His mother stopped squeezing the boy so tightly and leaned back to look at his face in the flickering candlelight.

'Yes, James, it's your mother. What's wrong with your voice?'

'I'm not James,' the boy said. 'You never gave me a name.'

'What's he talking about, Doctor?' Mr Lees whispered, but the physician could offer no answer. Mr Lees approached his youngest boy. 'What are you talking about, son?'

'I'm not your son - I'm your daughter. Your second daughter.' James smiled at his father. 'Don't you know me?'

'My second daughter? What are you talking about, lad?'

'I've only got three bairns and they're all boys like you.'

'You have five children - but only the boys were born,'

James said calmly. 'Mam had the doctor kill me and my sister before you knew about us.'

Martha Lees staggered back from the boy, one hand held up to her horrified face. 'No! No! This child is lying!'

Mr Lees reached out a hand to his son. 'Come on now James, you're frightening your mother. It's true, she did lost two babies before

having you - that's why your brothers are so much older than you - but those were miscarriages.'

The boy shook his head sadly. 'That's what she told you But I was murdered.'

Martha struck James across the face, a vicious slap that nearly sent the boy sprawling. 'You'll stop talking like this, James! You've no right, no right at all!'

James pointed at his mother, his eyes staring at her. 'You killed me. You and the doctor - you murdered me!'

Martha slapped the boy's face, again and again, until she hardly had strength to raise her arm. But still he accused her until she fell sobbing into her husband's arms. Mr Lees looked incredulously at his boy, unable to take in what was happening.

'Doctor, please, tell me - could the boy be possessed? He speaks and says things only a devil would whisper in your ear...'

Kirkhope didn't know what to say. Plainly, the child was speaking in tongues, the sort of behaviour associated with the saintly and the insane. This was beyond the experience of a humble country doctor. More frightening WAS the fact that every word the child spoke was the al in h. Kirkhope had helped Martha Lees to get rid of two tinhorn children. She had begged to be relieved of the burden. The physician had agreed only when the distraught mother threatened to spread word of his nocturnal activities to the authorities. The owners of the cotton mills would not take kindly to having an abortionist in their presence. He had refused to help her a third time, sickened by the woman's actions and his own.

Kirkhope had believed it would almost be a relief if his activities were revealed and his banishment decreed. Instead she had carried the child to full term and given birth to James. Now the doctor almost wished he had acceded to her wishes and killed that baby too.

Then, just as quickly as the episode had taken the boy, it released him. James collapsed backwards on to the examination bench, his head thudding against the wooden surface. The doctor stepped forward to check the child's breathing and pulse.

'Whatever possessed him seems to have gone, for now. I will keep him here, under observation,' Kirkhope said.

'Perhaps this is some passing malady, a phase brought on by the shock of his near drowning. In a day or two this behaviour may fade and he can be returned to you. If not...'

If not?'

'There is a hospital, in Glasgow. It takes in patients who are troubled, whose families are not able to cope with their behaviour. James would be safe there.'

'An asylum?' Martha asked, a bony fist clutching at the cloth of her dress.

'Of sorts. It is an annexe to an establishment called the Lock. The main building takes in women whose condition is unsuitable for asylums, while the annexe is for disturbed children. I have heard good work is being done there.

'Kirkhope gently stroked the hair on the boy's head, hoping to soothe away whatever was troubling his young mind. 'It would be best for your family if you did not speak of what you have witnessed here. There is no need to worry the other members of the community. I will simply say young James almost drowned and is being kept here to recover - the truth is always best in such cases. In the meantime you must talk to other parents, make sure no other child visits the falls.'

'Was it the curse? Is that what has taken my boy?' Mr Lees asked.

'Perhaps. All such superstitions have a grain of truth hidden within them. Whatever ails the child, we will find no more answers to it tonight. I bid you both return home and try to get what rest you can. You may visit James in the morning and we shall see what fresh hope a new dawn may bring.'

Mr Lees nodded and led his reluctant wife from the room.

Dr Kirkhope closed and bolted the door after them before turning back to the stricken child. He pulled open a drawer and removed several lengths of leather strapping, each with a metal clasp at either end. The physician methodically bound the boy to the bench, the clasps clipping into hooks set on either side of it. Satisfied the child could not escape, Kirkhope whispered into James's ear.

'I don't comprehend how you know what you do, but you can never speak of it again. If I have to see you locked away for life, you will stay silent. Do you understand me?'

James did not speak, his face contorted with fear.

Dr Kirkhope blew out the candles and retreated to his nearby bedroom where an unsettled sleep awaited, full of nightmares about the sins of his past.

Chapter One

February 14, 1863

General George Doulton found the atmosphere in Windsor stifling after a lifetime in active service. Unlike many of his contemporaries the general had not bought his commissions, he had earned them on bloody battlegrounds and foreign fields. Born the son of a parson, Doulton had begun his military career with the 7th Dragoon Guards before transferring into HM 22nd Foot as a captain. He had seen action during the conquests of Sind and Meanee before being promoted to major-general at the outbreak of the Crimean War. Doulton believed himself well liked by the men under his command and they proved him right, following him into the most unforgiving of conflicts and administering one hell of a towelling to the Russians. His weary and wounded body was invalided home in 1855, to receive a promotion to general. But Doulton firmly believed he belonged at war.

Life during peacetime was no life at all for a soldier.

Having to remain at court in this funereal atmosphere was more like a living death. Raised voices and colourful expletives were forbidden, let alone the clash of bullets and bayonets. Doulton longed for action, his spirit sorely tried by these past weary weeks. He had come to Windsor to receive the Queen's thanks for his past services, but she had been taken by his manner, saying it was reminiscent of her late, much missed husband. So Doulton found himself trapped in this graveyard of ghouls, everyone hanging on Her Majesty's words.

The woman needed to be brought out of herself, that was all. Mourning the loss of a loved one was all very well, but the Queen seemed to wallow in her own misery, Doulton told himself. He would never express such sentiments out loud, his loyalty to the throne was implacable, but how he hungered for relief from this place. When the strangers arrived, it was a blessing of sorts. But the general was still uneasy about their presence. Assassins had tried and, happily, failed to

take the Queen's life before. Surely it was better any visitors of unknown background be approved before being given an audience with Her Majesty?

Doulton paused before a mirror to adjust his dress uniform. The golden sash across his chest gleamed against the vibrant fabric of the red tunic, a row of medals firmly affixed above his heart. The general's ruddy face confirmed his rude health, the old wounds long since healed. He fancied there was the hint of a twinkle in his eye. At last, it felt as though the game was afoot once more.

Satisfied, Doulton resumed walking, the scabbard of his sword slapping heavily against his left leg as he strode confidently forwards, back erect, chin up, every inch the fearsome warrior. Yes, if any assassins tried to get past Old Blood and Guts, they would have quite a job on their hands.

Ahead he could see the double doors leading into the Queen's office, two servants standing either side of the entranceway, each wearing a black armband of mourning.

Doulton raised an imperious eyebrow at the servants.

'Well? What are you waiting for? Announce me!'

Sir Henry Ponsonby appeared from the shadows, catching the general off guard. The Queen's private secretary was light of foot and unobtrusive, qualities essential in royal service.

'Ahh, General, there you are. Her Majesty is occupied with visitors at present and thus cannot see you.'

Doulton was having none of that. 'It's about these visitors I wish to see her!'

Sir Henry smiled thinly. 'For now, she wishes to interview them herself.'

'Damn it, man, this is most irregular. The Queen has appointed me as her personal adviser on matters of household security but refuses to let me do my job. How, pray tell, am I supposed to protect Her Majesty from herself?'

The general's voice was rising in volume, a symptom of his increasing frustration. Whitehall and its monarch would be better served by military men, rather than the black-suited rabble of self-important,

obsequious civilians represented by the likes of Ponsonby.

'Please, General, I must ask you to respect Her Majesty's wishes in this matter.'

'What about my men?'

'What about them?'

'I received a despatch last night saying more than two dozen have been sent to make camp in Scotland! Perhaps you'd care to explain to me how such an order was given, without my knowledge or consent?'

'Her Majesty commanded it,' the private secretary said.

'Do you question her right as ruler of the British Empire to command the forces of that empire?'

'Of course not! Deuce, man, why must you twist everything I say? I simply wished to know how and, more importantly, why this has happened.' Doulton bristled with exasperation, his cheeks becoming redder by the moment.

'Her Majesty received word of a significant discovery in the area to which your troops - your men, as you put it - have been despatched. She directed an exploratory force be placed in the region, to safeguard against any enemy action.'

'Enemy action? In Scotland? For the love of God, from where is this enemy action expected to come?'

Ponsonby shrugged. made the same points to Her Majesty as you have made to me, but her resolve was implacable.

Now, if you please, General, I must get back inside. When the Queen is ready for you, I will have one of the pages sent with a summons immediately.'

The private secretary withdrew, leaving Doulton fuming in the corridor. Damn and blast the woman! And damn and blast her underlings, too! The general stomped away down the corridor. Well, there was more than one way to outwit an enemy. Doulton felt certain his officers would be more forthcoming with news of what was so special about this mission. Nobody commandeered his men without showing him due deference. Another thought occurred to him -

perhaps Scotland Yard might have some fresh intelligence on potential threats to the Queen's safety? Yes, perhaps a letter to the Commissioner...

Baroness von Luckner adjusted the collar of her ward's shirt, making sure it lay flat against his jacket. She brushed a dark comma of hair from the young man's eyes and stepped back to admire him. The Baroness had spent the last of her savings preparing for this royal audience and now the day had come, she could not stop herself from fussing. James kept trying to slap her hand away but his protests were silenced by a harsh rap across the knuckles. Luckner did not require her cane to walk, but she found the sterling silver handle a useful device for keeping Lees in line.

'Now, do you know what to say?' she hissed at him. They were waiting in an antechamber to see the Queen, unobserved and alone for the first time since entering the grounds of Windsor Castle.

'That I have a message from her beloved.'

'Exactly. But to deliver that message –'

'I will have to hold a séance.' James glared at the woman, annoyance visible in his dark eyes. 'We've been over this a dozen times -'

'And we'll keep going over it until you remember properly.'

To deliver that message it would be best to stage a séance, perhaps in the place she feels closest to her beloved!

'Yes, yes,' he said impatiently.

'Good. And what else?'

James rolled his eyes but still cowered when the Baroness began drawing back her cane, as if to strike him again. 'Don't mention money.'

Luckner smiled, an action unfamiliar to her harsh, unforgiving face. She was clad all in black as an apparent mark of respect for the Queen's state of mourning. Her greying hair was pulled back into a bun, emphasising the severity of her features. For now, the Baroness could control her ward. She knew such circumstances would not last much longer. That was why she had pushed for the royal audience now.

The doors to the Queen's office swung open, revealing Sir Henry Ponsonby inside. 'Her Majesty will see you now.'

The Baroness bobbed her head in thanks before walking forwards, leaning heavily on the cane. The Queen's private office was a large chamber, exquisitely decorated and adorned with fine paintings and statues. Light flooded in from arched windows, helping to illuminate the high ceilings.

Servants remained beside each doorway while two ladies-in-waiting flanked the Queen. Victoria was seated behind an ornate table, its surface cluttered with papers, ink pots containing liquids of different hues, and other paraphernalia.

But the most imposing and compelling aspect of the room was its owner.

The Queen was bent intently over a letter, her chubby fingers clutching a dull-nibbed pen as she scrawled in a spidery hand. Her hair was hidden by a black silk bonnet, just an edging of white providing any contrast. Her pale face was round, almost heart-shaped, with little of the rouge fashionable in some circles. Her figure was swathed in more black, sleeves extending down to her wrists.

Finally, Victoria looked up and regarded the two visitors.

Her features betrayed little. Indeed, she seemed to be holding herself in check, as if waging some inner battle with her own emotions. 'So,' she began and then said nothing for fully a minute. 'You have come, as we requested. Thank you.'

Luckner had happily taken her ward round most of the royal courts in Europe but here she felt ill at ease. Partly this was caused by the flutter of fear in her stomach, but another factor was the overpowering stench of mothballs in the room.

The Baroness knew her host was not yet fifty, but the odour hanging in the chamber spoke of a life already locked away from open air. Finally, the Baroness broke the silence, bobbing in a slight curtsy as she spoke. It was our pleasure, ma'am. Indeed, we felt it was our duty.'

'Quite.' The Queen swallowed heavily, then took a sip of water from a crystal tumbler. One of her ladies-in-waiting refilled the glass from a matching decanter before stepping back into place behind the monarch. 'We understand you have a message.'

'Indeed, ma'am.' The Baroness indicated James at her side. 'My young ward is a gifted medium. Many times he I has communicated with the spirit world on behalf of kings, queens and -'

'Yes, yes, we know all this,' the Queen interrupted testily.

What is the message?'

Luckner began protesting as best she could, determined the encounter should proceed as she had imagined it.

'Excuse me, Your Majesty, but he -'

James had other ideas and cut her off abruptly. 'Albert,'

the young man said, stepping towards the Queen's desk. 'It was Albert!'

There was a gasp of astonishment from the court attendants at the boy's temerity. Victoria looked just as shocked but quickly composed herself.

If you mean our late husband, we would prefer it if you addressed him by his proper title - the Royal Consort, Prince Albert,' she snapped back.

James responded with a brief nod. 'Forgive me, Your Majesty. I did not wish to speak out of turn. You see -'

The Baroness stepped to James's side, trying to keep some semblance of control. 'You see, Master James Lees is-'

The Queen silenced Luckner with a baleful glare before turning her attention back to the young man. She gave him a brief smile of encouragement. 'You were saying?'

'The Royal Consort, Prince Albert, has spoken through me on at least two occasions, Your Majesty,' James replied. 'At first I did not recognise the spirit who took control of me. It was only when I was received by the Crown Princess of Prussia the discovery was made.'

'Yes, our daughter wrote about your remarkable gift,' the Queen said. 'Her letter quite moved us. She wrote how you were able to mimic our beloved husband's voice in a most uncanny manner. We also received a letter from your guardian about your abilities, along with further information!'

'If Your Majesty will permit me,' Luckner interjected, still determined not to be shut out of this discussion, 'my ward is no mimic. He speaks in the tongues of the dearly departed. If you will, he becomes their earthly vessel.'

'Thank you,' the Queen snapped back, not bothering to look at the Baroness. 'We do understand the concept of mediumship. Pray, do not see fit to interrupt us again.' These last words were spoken with a lightness of tone but the underlying threat was quite evident. Luckner realised she had overreached herself. Whatever happened next, she could not speak again until invited to do so. It would be up to the boy to carry this off.

'The Crown Princess recognised the spirit speaking through me. She said so during the course of a séance and was able to converse with your late husband, the Royal Consort, Prince Albert! James announced this as if it were utterly matter-of-fact, the sort of thing that happened to him every day.

'We are intrigued,' the Queen admitted. 'You say these spirits, as you call them, possess you - they control you. Are you aware of what you are saying and doing? Do you remember what happens afterwards?'

'I have a complete recollection of these episodes, Your Majesty. As for an awareness... it is as if I were dreaming and awake at the same time. I feel my spirit drift away from my body, until it floats in the air overhead. I look down on what is happening, observing it all. I can see my own body below me, but it talks with the voices of those who have passed over to the Other Side. When the séance comes to an end, the visiting spirits leave my body and I am drawn back down into this mortal shell.'

'Most remarkable,' the Queen replied. She began to push back her chair, a lady-in-waiting quickly stepping forward to remove it. Victoria walked around the table to stand nearer James, but maintained a safe distance from her visitors.

'As you probably know, the loss of our beloved husband has been a bitter blow for the nation, as well as for our family,' the Queen said. 'We would be most displeased should any charlatan attempt to trade upon that sorrow.'

James bowed his head respectfully. 'Your Majesty, I have no wish to obtain any pecuniary advantage from this audience. My motives are simple and honourable - to serve Your Majesty in any way you see fit,

and to act as conduit for the spirit world to speak with those still on this side.'

The Queen nodded, apparently satisfied. 'What is this message?'

'Your Majesty, the Royal Consort made mention of portals between this mortal plain and the spirit world. I believe I may have already been through one such portal when I was still just a boy. My guardian, Baroness Von Luckner, sent you details of its location in her letter. It was upon returning from that hallowed place that I became a medium for the departed, their conduit on Earth.'

'We have despatched a contingent of troops to investigate and guard this site. We expect a report from our expeditionary force shortly. What else?'

'The rest is... difficult, Your Majesty.' James stared down at the elaborately stitched rug on the floor of the chamber. 'How so, Master Lees?'

'I communicate best during a séance. If you would be willing to take part in such an endeavour, I might hope to tell you more.'

This suggestion created a flurry of looks and glances among the others in the room, but the Queen did not flinch.

'Where does one suggest we hold this - séance?'

'Wherever you feel closest to your dearly departed.' James replied without hesitation. 'It is not for me to stipulate such a location, you know it best yourself.'

Victoria pursed her lips. 'Our husband rests in the beloved Mausoleum at Frogmore - we visit him there daily. Would that be a suitable place?'

'Undoubtedly. The hours of twilight are best for contacting the spirit world.'

'So be it,' the Queen announced. 'Tonight we will adjourn to the Mausoleum and a séance shall be held. But we must warn you -' With this Victoria fixed a steely gaze upon the Baroness's face - 'no word of what occurs in that place may ever be spoken of nor written. No other living soul can ever know what happens there. Is that perfectly clear?'

Luckner dropped into another curtsy, avoiding the monarch's eyes.

The Queen turned away and strode back to her chair. 'You may go. We shall summon you at the appointed hour.' Victoria sat down and returned to her correspondence. Sir Henry Ponsonby slipped forwards unobtrusively and began guiding the visitors out. Within moments they were back in the antechamber, alone again.

The Baroness let out a relieved gasp. She smiled at the young man, for once the emotion genuine on her face. 'Well done! That went better than I could have imagined.'

James just stared at her, his features sour and pinched.

His voice suddenly took on a menace and timbre unlike any it had displayed before. 'You fool! You almost destroyed my hopes with your incompetent bumbling! Never - never -

interrupt me again. Do I make myself clear?'

Luckner stepped back in surprise. 'Yes, y-yes - of course!'

Then the moment passed, as if a cloud had moved over the young man's face. He collapsed to the floor in a crumpled heap, blood trickling from his nostrils.

Sergeant Charles Otto Vollmer looked down in wonder at the valley. He had travelled to foreign lands and seen vistas both remarkable and terrifying, but he had never laid eyes upon such an unlikely sight. Below was an incongruous assemblage of buildings, clustered in parallel arcs beside the River Clyde. Nearest the water's edge the four tallest buildings stood end to end in a row - probably the cotton mills, Vollmer thought. Each structure was five storeys high, with sandstone walls of two different hues and the dark grey slate roofs characteristic of this region in Scotland. Further back from the river were two parallel rows of tenement blocks, homes for the people of this community. The sergeant could see the lines of washing hung out between the windows.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this working village was how new everything looked. It appeared to have been purpose-built within the last hundred years and well looked after, unlike the haphazard homes and cobbled streets of Whitechapel in East London where Vollmer had been brought up. There a dense pall of smoke hung in the air, always accompanied by the stench of human excrement sluicing down the gutters. By comparison this place smelled clean and fresh, a brisk breeze hurrying up the sides of the valley from the river. The steep hills were thick with leafless trees, the harsh winter having

denuded much of the surrounding forest. February was not a month the sergeant would have chosen to make camp in such a place but orders were orders.

The contingent had set forth several days earlier from Aldershot, travelling into London before taking the train north to Scotland. The journey had been a fractured, stop-start affair. Finally, the men had been forced back on foot for the last miles.

Lieutenant Reginald Ashe appeared beside Vollmer on the hillside overlooking the village. 'Remarkable, isn't it?' the lieutenant said cheerfully. He was several years younger than the sergeant but still outranked him, thanks to a rich family.

Ashe's commission had been purchased for him, once the horrors of the Crimean War had passed. While Vollmer had been earning his rank in mud-strewn trenches outside Sebastopol, young Ashe had been playing sport on the fields of Eton. All the boyish enthusiasm in the world wouldn't keep Ashe alive for long if he ever saw combat, the sergeant had decided. He was developing a healthy contempt for the lieutenant, but kept such feelings to him-self. It didn't do to get on the wrong side of officers, they would just take it out on you in other ways.

'Yes, sir,' Vollmer replied. 'Can't say as I've seen anything like it before.'

'Quite.' Ashe looked about himself. 'Well, where do you think we should make camp for the night? How about down in the village itself?'

The sergeant shook his head slowly. 'I don't think so, sir.'

As he appeared crestfallen. 'Why ever not? Looks like a lovely sort of place, very friendly and welcoming. Be good to get a night's sleep in a proper bed.'

Indeed, sir, but maintaining discipline with the men is easier when they have fewer distractions. A village full of comely young female mill workers is also likely to be a village full of temptations, if you follow my meaning.'

'Yes, yes - I see what you're suggesting.' Ashe rubbed a thumb across his chin. 'So, then - where do you suggest?'

'Perhaps best if we find a sheltered site up here in the hills for now.'

It'll be dark within an hour so the sooner we make camp the better. Tomorrow we can move upstream to the falls and establish a more permanent presence.' Vollmer advised.

'Right-o! I say, this is proving to be quite an adventure, isn't it?'

The sergeant smiled as best he could before replying.

'Yes, sir. Well, if you'll excuse me, I'll fall the men in and get them to work on making camp.'

'Good show. I'm going to venture into the village and make contact with the natives. The last thing they'll be expecting is a contingent of Her Majesty's finest settling in the hills above them. Best I give the head man some idea of why we're here.'

Vollmer seized this opportunity to put a question of his own for once. 'Why exactly are we here, sir?'

'Dashed if I know. I simply received word to establish a presence beside the Falls of Clyde. Once we're in place I've got sealed orders to open about our next task. Apparently we can expect additional equipment within a day or two. Ashe shrugged. 'Other than that, your guess is as good as mine.'

Probably better, the sergeant thought. 'Very good, sir.'

Well, I'll go see to the men.'

'Right-o!'

Vollmer gritted his teeth, snapped to attention and gave a precise salute before marching away. Right-o! What in God's name were they teaching officers these days? The sooner somebody outlawed the purchasing of commissions, the better!

* * *

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: Precise landings of the TARDIS are not always to be relied upon, except for their tendency to evoke some perverse irony. Indeed, the Doctor's ability to pilot this vehicle through time and space is almost as erratic as the machine itself.

Getting the TARDIS to land at a particular locus can either be simplicity itself or an almost unobtainable goal. From the moment

Tegan stepped on board she wanted to get back to London in 1981, but it took a temporal anomaly to achieve that. It was a surprise to both herself and the Doctor when we accidentally arrived at Heathrow - precisely where we had been trying to go.

Having recently left that site, we found ourselves on course for almost the same point in space (if not time) when the Doctor set materialisation co-ordinates. 'Remarkable,' he said. 'We won't be more than a few miles from Heathrow - at least, from the site of what will be Heathrow Airport. But you would have a long wait to catch the next plane?

'Why? What year is it?' I asked.

'1863. February 14, to be exact, about six in the evening locally. Valentine's Day.'

I did not know to what this referred. The Doctor explained it was the feast day of a saint, a religious individual from the past who was considered to have been especially holy.

During the twentieth century this feast day would become a special day of celebration among some Earth cultures for those in love.

'People would send each other cards and flowers, often anonymously, to express their love for each other,' the Doctor said.

'Why anonymously?'

'It was a tradition of the time.'

'Rather an odd one. Why tell someone of your love for them without revealing who you are? It makes no sense -

much like this garb.'

'The Doctor had suggested I change into something more appropriate for the period.' The more skin you can conceal, the better - the Victorians could be rather prudish.'

I had tried several floor-length dresses and finally settled on an all-encompassing gown of dark cloth. For reasons defying understanding the makers had sewn animals' bones into the garment, as if determined to torture the wearer by a slow but inexorable crushing of her ribs. Selecting a pair of simple shoes in a matching colour, I made my way back to the control room. Getting through doorways had

proved a struggle, due to all the extra layers of cloth fitted beneath my dress, until I hit upon the notion of turning sideways. I asked the Doctor if these Victorians had wider doorways than those fitted inside the TARDIS.

'Indeed they did. Wider doors, corridors and stairways, higher ceilings - among those who could afford such things.'

The Doctor finished a few last tweaks of the central console's many switches and dials, then removed his half-frame spectacles to regard my clothes. 'Very good! You will be quite the lady in that. Most becoming.'

'What about you? Are your clothes appropriate for the period?'

The Doctor examined his own attire. 'What, these old things? No need to worry. It's one of the joys of being a Time Lord - somehow people never seem to question what I'm wearing. Carry yourself with the right degree of authority and I find you can talk yourself out of any difficulty.'

Only after talking us into it first, I thought, but kept the opinion to myself. 'So why do I have to wear this?' In 1863

most women were seen but not heard.'

'Only most?'

'Well, you haven't met Queen Victoria!'

'And you have?'

'That's a good question. 'When you've travelled to as many times and places as I have, keeping track of them all can be rather a challenge.'

By now the central column was juddering to a halt. The Doctor gave a broad smile as he made a few last-minute adjustments. 'Here we go!'

The cortege made its way slowly from Windsor Castle to the gardens of nearby Frogmore House, travelling towards the estate's Long Walk. A pair of guards on horseback led the procession, followed by a series of carriages containing the Queen, members of her retinue, Doulton and the two visitors.

The general insisted on travelling in the same barouche as Her Majesty, so he was best placed to react if anything untoward should

happen. He kept a loaded pistol by his side at all times when in the presence of the Queen. There had been at least two assassination attempts that were public knowledge and Doulton believed only further vigilance would prevent some other assailant being more successful.

James Lees and Baroness von Luckner travelled in the last carriage, another pair of guards following on horseback.

The Baroness was enjoying the fresh air after being stifled by the stale corridors within the castle. One of the Queen's maids was travelling with them as chaperone, preventing the Baroness from issuing any final instructions to her ward. They had travelled together for more than a year but Luckner felt certain there would soon be a parting of the ways. James was becoming increasingly resistant to supervision, challenging her authority in ways she could not have imagined just months before. It was difficult to reconcile this behaviour with the child she had first encountered two Decembers ago.

The carriage began to slow as the driver tugged on his reins. The wooden wheels skidded on the gravel path before coming to a halt. A footman jumped from the rear of the vehicle and opened the right-hand door, folding down the stairs and offering his assistance to the occupants. The Baroness went first, followed by James and the Queen's maid. In the gloaming it was difficult to discern their surroundings, but Luckner could make out a protective scattering of trees, masking the Mausoleum from the Long Walk. A corner of the building was just visible ahead, where servants bearing lanterns were lighting the way for the royal party. The visitors were ushered forwards to join the others.

When it came fully into view, the Mausoleum was an impressive sight although not yet complete. A copper dome glinted above the structure, its metal surface just catching the last light in the sky. The outer walls of stone and granite melted into the twilight, barely illuminated by the lanterns lining the pathway. The Queen reached the empty doorway to the building and stopped, waiting for James and his guardian to join her. Once they had, she spoke to them in hushed, reverential tones.

'Within these walls lies our beloved husband and consort.

The Mausoleum is still being finished but we long for the day when we may join him here,' she said before venturing inside.

Within, the walls of red marble were inlaid with similar stone of other colourings. The Queen paused just inside the entrance, her eyes closed, lips silently mouthing a phrase.

She became aware of the others waiting for her. 'We were reciting the words that shall be inscribed above the door.'

"Farewell best beloved, here at last I shall rest with thee, with thee in Christ I shall rise again."

The general stepped forward to address the Queen. 'Your Majesty, one of the side chapels has been prepared, just as you requested.'

Victoria nodded and let him lead those gathered to one of the wings branching off the main chamber. There waited a round table, a black silk cloth over its surface and a small vase of freshly cut flowers standing in the centre. Six chairs were placed evenly around it, a handful of candles illuminating the scene. The Queen turned to James and smiled at him. 'We place ourselves in your hands, young man.'

James nodded and guided her to one of the chairs, then stood behind the opposite chair. The Baroness took her position to his left, while James invited any others from the royal party who wished to participate to occupy the remaining places. Doulton politely refused to be involved, saying he needed to maintain a good watch. Instead two ladies-in-waiting and a maid were brought to the table. Once all the places were filled, James bade the Queen to be seated. The others followed her example, nervously pulling their chairs in close to the table. The young man addressed everyone else in the side chamber.

'I must ask all others to leave this place and go beyond our hearing. The séance will not succeed if sceptics and unbelievers are present, as they can block spirit influence and communication. This is not a parlour game, nor is it for your entertainment. We gather here seeking answers to specific questions. We must be careful what doors we open.'

Doulton glowered at James but soon retreated, leading the others into the main chamber. Once that noise had died away, James fixed his gaze upon those sitting around the table. 'Firstly, I want you to relax. Focus on your breathing, taking air in through your nostrils and letting it out through your mouths. Breathe in, count to three, and then gently let the air escape from you again. That's it. Keep breathing and as you breathe, think about why we have come here, what we wish to achieve. It is important that as long as the séance continues,

we must all remain at this table. None may leave or break the circle. Is that perfectly clear?' The others nodded their agreement.

'Good. Now, I want you to lay your hands flat on the table, palms down. Move your hands apart until the small fingers are touching the small fingers of those either side of you.

Good - the circle is complete. Remember, none may leave the circle unless I say so. Close your eyes and we may begin. Now I will recite an oath of protection three times. You must believe in the oath and the protection it offers.'

James cleared his throat and closed his own eyes before beginning the recitation. ask for the strength and guidance of the White Light. Please surround us with your protection.' He paused and then repeated the incantation twice.

A long silence followed, accompanied by the faintest of zephyrs flickering the candle flames. 'We have begun,' James announced, his voice calm and gentle. call upon the spirits of my sisters to guide me and provide a conduit between this world and the next. Dearly departed, do you have a message for us?'

No reply came, so the young man tried another question.

'Please come through to us. Is there someone here you wish to speak to?' Again, no reply. 'We are ready for you, dearly departed. Do you have something to -'

The Baroness felt James's body spasm and jerk beside her, his fingers tapping repeatedly against the table top, his teeth chattering. It was starting. Just as quickly, James's body relaxed and resumed breathing. When he spoke, it was with a voice not his own.

'Gute Frauchen...'

The Queen and her ladies-in-waiting gasped. The voice was unmistakably that of the Royal Consort, Prince Albert, whose remains were interred elsewhere in the Mausoleum.

'Are you there, *gute Frauchen*?' the voice asked.

'I am here,' Victoria replied. '*Es ist kleines Frauchen.*'

'Weibchen, I feel how you grieve for me, but there is another way'

'What way is this?'

'In Christ we shall rise again.'

'Yes, my beloved. Your mortal remains are here now, in the Mausoleum. Every year we have a service here on the day you passed over and I pray for the day we may be together again.'

'If you wish it, that day may be soon. We can be reunited and yet you can still remain with our children.'

'How, my beloved? How is this possible?'

Luckner opened one of her eyes to peek at those around the table. The Queen's face was a mixture of exultation and wonder, her chest rising and falling rapidly. It was strange to hear the Queen refer to herself in the singular, instead of the royal 'we'. All pretence, all affectation had been shed. Her attendants seemed just as intent on the moment. As always, James was being swept along by the fervour of those around him.

'There is a place where the distance between this life and the next is at its narrowest, where the pull of the spirit world is strong.'

'Yes, my beloved. I received word about this from our daughter. I sent a contingent of men north to guard this place.'

James nodded fervently, his eyes still firmly shut. 'You have done well, *Weibchen*. But you must do more if we are to be reunited in this world. You must open up this gateway and send an envoy to the Other Side. But you must hurry - soon my soul will have made the transition and our chance will have passed.'

'I understand. Your *kleines Frauchen* understands, beloved.'

'*Gute*. You must send this boy back -'

Suddenly, the Mausoleum was filled with an unearthly noise, like the trumpeting of a dozen mechanical elephants and great blocks of granite grinding together. The cacophony reverberated about the walls, terrifying the six at the table. A white light flashed on and off, casting strange shadows across the incomplete stonework and colonnades. 'What is it?' the Queen shouted, her hands clasped over her ears. 'Did you summon this?' she asked the young man. James could only shake his head.

The noise ceased as abruptly as it had begun, leaving just the distant echo of a heavy thump. A second afterwards the light was gone too. Doulton ran into the side chamber, his pistol drawn, a lantern clasped in his other hand. 'Your Majesty! Are you safe and well?'

'Perfectly so,' the Queen replied, quickly composing herself. 'What caused that commotion?'

'I know not, but I shall soon find out. Please remain here until I return.' The general was already leaving to search the rest of the Mausoleum. James stood up, ready to follow the old soldier, but the Baroness pulled him back down into his chair.

'No, James, you should remain here,' she insisted. 'Until we know more about what just happened, we should all stay here?'

The Queen nodded her agreement. 'Young man - that was a most remarkable display. We could have sworn we heard our late husband's voice issue from your mouth?'

'Yes, Your Majesty, it was him speaking. I observed from above as he took control of my body. It was a shame that cacophony broke the lines of communication.' James asked that they all hold hands to form a complete energy circle, so he could bring the séance to a more satisfactory conclusion.

Once the six were in physical contact, the young man let his pupils roll back behind his eyelids and began intoning. 'Thank you for all the things you have given us in the past, the present and the future. Thank you.' James opened his eyes again. 'It is over.'

General Doulton found the two intruders first, standing at the entrance to the Mausoleum. One was a fair-haired man of indeterminate age, his face without the lines or guile born of experience, but a keen intelligence evident in his eyes. He was clad in a beige frock coat with scarlet trim, striped trousers, a knitted pullover and a white shirt, open at the neck. Curiously, this new arrival had a growth of celery attached to the lapel of his frock coat and a hat of straw rolled in one hand. His garb was somewhat eccentric but he presented no obvious threat that the general could see.

The other intruder was a young woman of no more than twenty years. Like her companion, she seemed more curious than dangerous, her friendly features dominated by wide, inquisitive eyes and high cheekbones. She was wearing a full-length dress of dark silk, cut in the style Doulton had seen on his infrequent trips into London. He noticed

something else about her, an air of self-assurance and an upright posture that suggested an almost regal stature, despite her diminutive height. Plainly she had been raised among the aristocracy, perhaps even possessed some noble blood.

The pair saw Doulton advancing on them, pistol drawn, but neither tried to run or attack. Instead the man merely sighed while the woman glared at her companion with exasperation.

'Why is no one ever pleased to see us, Doctor?' she asked.

'Who are you?' the general demanded. He was surprised when the male intruder stepped forward with a smile to give him a firm but friendly handshake, and then perplexed by the answer this interloper offered.

'Hello! I'm the Doctor, and this young lady is my friend, Nyssa of Traken.'

'I require your full name, sir.'

'Very well - Smith. Dr John Smith.'

'That is better, but we have no need of a physician here.'

The woman joined their conversation, not waiting to be included. 'The Doctor is as much a scientist as a healer,' she explained.

Two footmen appeared from outside. 'General, you should come and see this!' one of them called. Doulton ushered his suspects outside, following the footmen around a corner of the Mausoleum. Standing beside the building was a tall blue object, the words POLICE PUBLIC CALL BOX emblazoned on its side.

'What the deuce is that doing here?' the general spluttered.

'We arrived in it,' the woman called Nyssa said. It's the -'

'The best way of storing and moving equipment,' the Doctor interjected, a look passing between him and his companion. 'My apologies if the noise from our unscheduled arrival startled you or anyone else here!'

Doulton was starting to put the pieces together now. Is it one of these new-fangled telegraphic machines?'

'Something like that, yes.'

'So, you were sent by the police - Scotland Yard, was it?'

'You could say that. We're investigating strange phenomena in the area around Windsor Castle and the trail led us here,' the Doctor said by way of explanation.

Doulton nodded happily. It seemed his communication to the Yard had been acted upon with greater alacrity than he could have imagined.

'The Doctor believes there is a serious threat to the stability of the space-time continuum centred on this locality,'

Nyssa added helpfully. A sterner look passed to her from the Doctor, but the general was already nodding sagely.

'I know nothing of this continuum, but any threat to the Queen is serious,' he said. 'We can never be too vigilant in safeguarding the ruler of our mighty empire!'

'Quite right too,' the Doctor said. 'Safety first, that's my policy. Well, perhaps we could move indoors. Night is closing in rather quickly and all that...'

Doulton replaced his pistol in its holster and led the arrivals back into the Mausoleum. must say, I am most grateful for any light you can shed on events, Doctor. The claims made by this young man and his guardian, they seem to beggar belief.'

'Is that so, General?'

'Damnably so, yes. The Queen will listen to no counsel, heed no warnings nor brook any opposition. Perhaps you can help to dissuade her from this course of action.'

'Well, I will endeavour to do what is best, as always...'

'Capital, Doctor, capital. I must say, I was taken aback by your sudden appearance and curious garb but you seem exactly the right sort - a gentleman and a scholar.'

Nyssa cleared her throat conspicuously as they reached the entranceway to the Mausoleum again. 'Perhaps I could have a few words with my fellow traveller - alone?'

The general concurred. 'I will go ahead and seek a brief audience for

you with Her Majesty. If you would be so kind as to wait here.' He disappeared inside and found the Queen preparing to leave, accompanied by her attendants, the young man Lees and his guardian.

'Yes, General, what is it?'

'Your Majesty, I have located the cause of the disturbance.'

'Indeed. And what, pray tell, was responsible? And who are those people outside?'

'Two visitors, one of them sent by the police at Scotland Yard. They have come investigating reports of strange phenomena close to the castle.'

'Intriguing. Have them brought before us.'

'Yes, Your Majesty.' The general turned and beckoned the Doctor and Nyssa inside. 'This gentleman is Dr John Smith, and his companion is Lady Nyssa of Traken.'

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: As in most things, the Doctor was right about the reception we received upon arrival. A military man was the first we encountered, a bluff individual waving a projectile weapon and asking bluff questions. But the Doctor quickly talked his way inside our interrogator's trust and within minutes we were to be introduced to Queen Victoria. The Doctor did his best to school me in the protocol of the time.

'Never speak until you are spoken to. When you are introduced, curtsy respectfully. Call the Queen "Your Majesty"

when you first speak to her and "ma'am" after that.'

The general reappeared, waving us forward to meet the Queen. She was surprisingly small of size but suitably regal, with a tranquil grace and piercing eyes. Behind her were three other women, no doubt just a few of her many servants.

Off to one side stood an awkward young man and a stern-faced woman. She had a hand clamped on the young man's shoulder in a manner I can only describe as proprietorial.

The monarch welcomed us and began to introduce those attending her. Just as she reached the young man I felt my stomach twist with

nausea. Something was wrong, very wrong, I could feel it. Again, the stench of burning sugar assaulted my senses, just as it had done in the TARDIS

earlier. I swallowed hard to keep down a surge of bile.

'And this young man is James Lees, a gifted psychic,' the Queen said grandly. 'We have decided to appoint him as our Royal Medium.' That brought mutterings from the attendants and a smile to the stern-faced woman's pinched features.

The young man nodded graciously at this honour, then offered his hand to the Doctor.

'I am very pleased to meet you, sir.'

'Call me the Doctor - everyone does. This is my travelling companion, Nyssa.'

James shifted his attention to me and the nausea swept through me again. 'You shouldn't worry, Nyssa,' a voice said.

'I'm in a better place now, a happier place. You'll see.' I could see James's lips moving but the voice could only be that of one person - Adric.'

That must have been when I lost consciousness.

Doulton felt the introductions were going well until Lees began talking to Lady Nyssa. The lad's voice appeared to change, becoming one the general did not recognise. Lady Nyssa and the Doctor were plainly shaken by this manifestation and the young woman fell to the floor in a swoon. She cracked her head against the cold marble underfoot and lay quite still. Lees stumbled back, suddenly unsure of himself. 'I'm sorry, I - I don't know what came over me then. Normally such manifestations only occur in the confines of the séance...'

The Baroness took hold of her ward and led him aside.

Doulton could hear her hissing angrily at the young man.

'What do you think you are doing? You've put that poor woman into shock with your antics!'

'They're not antics,' Lees protested quietly. 'I told you, I'm losing control of this!' Von Luckner noticed the general's close attention to their

conversation and said no more, glaring at him.

Meanwhile, the Doctor was examining Nyssa. He picked up a slim notebook that was lying open beside her and pocketed it. 'I'm afraid it may be some time before she regains consciousness. Is there somewhere she could be moved to while she recovers?'

The Queen took charge of the situation. 'You shall return with us to Windsor Castle. We should like to know more about these investigations you mention. Before you arrived we experienced a strange phenomenon of our own, not dissimilar to that which has laid low Lady Nyssa. We should like you to travel back in our carriage.'

'Most gracious, Your Majesty.' The Doctor stood up and bowed to the Queen, before shifting his gaze to the general.

'Perhaps someone could look after the welfare of my companion...'

'Of course - it shall be seen to at once.' Doulton began making the necessary arrangements while listening to the Queen's next words.

'Doctor, there is something of kindred spirits about you and Lady Nyssa, as if you have both recently suffered a great loss.'

'Two losses, Your Majesty,' the Doctor admitted.

'We thought so. You are plainly still haunted by those absences, as we have been mourning our own. We shall have much to talk about?'

The Doctor bowed again. 'Your Majesty is too kind.'

During the carriage journey Victoria related the evening's events in precise detail. The Doctor listened intently, occasionally prompting her with further enquiries. Only when the tale was told did he seek any clarification. 'You mentioned the voice of the Royal Consort, Prince Albert, speaking of a passageway between this world and the next, ma'am. Could you recall for me the precise way he described this place?'

The Queen closed her eyes and began, slowly, to intone the words she had heard during the séance. ' "There is a place where the distance between this life and the next is at its narrowest, where the pull of the spirit world is strong. You must open up this gateway and send an envoy to the Other Side. But you must hurry - soon my soul will have made the transition and our chance will have passed. You must send this boy back - " ' The Queen opened her eyes again. 'That was the last

thing our beloved husband said before we were interrupted by your arrival. What will be your next step, Doctor?'

'My first concern is the welfare of my companion.

Tomorrow I wish to learn more about Master James Lees and his guardian, and the location of this gateway.'

'A wise course of action. Our private secretary has been determining the validity of Baroness Von Luckner's bona fides. We expect his report in the morning.' The Queen fell silent again, offering one last comment before they reached their destination. 'We are most grateful for your tact and open-minded approach to this matter, Doctor.'

'There are more things in heaven and earth than mere mortal man may understand, Your Majesty. I have learned it is best to approach the unexplained with a fair mind and open eyes. Better to see the truth quickly and pass judgement on it slowly.'

Victoria nodded in agreement. When they arrived back at the castle she bade the Doctor have a good night's rest and disappeared inside. He waited for the rest of the cortege and then supervised Nyssa's transfer indoors.

Chapter Two

February 15, 1863

The child is running, bare feet on the cold stone floor his lungs straining for air throat dry and raw. No matter how fast he runs, he doesn't seem to get any further Then footfalls become splashes as water trickles across the stones. Soon it is pulling at his ankles, dragging him down, tugging at his torso. He is gasping for breath but none comes, just liquid swirling into his mouth and gushing down his throat He gags and chokes, screaming. He has to escape, he has to get out The murky, silt-laden waters start to shimmer as a great light moves nearer It illuminates the depths and the boy forgets he needed to breathe, forgets he wants to escape. If he can just reach the light, everything will be better every -

Nyssa sat up with a start. What had that been? A dream or a nightmare? Already the details were fading away, driven from her conscious mind by the sunlight piercing the curtains, illuminating

thousands of dust particles floating above her bed. Nyssa closed her eyes and let herself lie back down, trying to hold on to the fast-receding fragments of what she had experienced. She was dreaming about drowning, she knew that for certain. It had been a dream, but not her own.

She had been a spectator, a voyeur. Already the cold waters were closing in around her. Nyssa shivered once and was asleep.

Baroness von Luckner entered the breakfast room to find the Doctor savouring a pair of kippers. He rose from his seat and welcomed her to the table before resuming his appraisal of the smoked herring. 'You know, I have sampled delicacies from many different worlds but there is little to match the simple delights of a kipper,' he enthused.

The Baroness remained unsure of what to make of this interloper who had appeared so mysteriously last night and wormed his way into the Queen's affections with such alacrity. She decided to humour him and see what more could be discovered. 'Is that correct?'

Oh, I should think so - can you think of anything finer?'

the Doctor replied, holding a forkful of fish aloft. Dinner in a diner perhaps?'

'I'm not sure I understand you, Doctor...'

'Do you have diners yet? Probably not. I suppose the closest British equivalent would be a coaching house - or a roadside cafe in future. Still, I fancy none of them could offer such a succulent morsel before midday.' He popped the forkful into his mouth and chewed on the fish with undisguised ardour.

'Your arrival last night was quite unexpected,' Luckner ventured.

'I do like to surprise people,' he said. 'You might not find them at their best, but they will be more honest that way - no time to hide their guilty secrets, as it were. Her Majesty said your family name was Luckner.'

'That's correct.' The Baroness sipped at the cup of tea that had appeared before her, spirited into place by one of the household staff lining the walls like ghosts.

'That's very interesting. I knew a Felix von Luckner once, commanded a German vessel during the Great War.'

'The Great War?'

'Most remarkable chap. Captured off the coast of Fiji And taken prisoner along with all his men. They were Interred in New Zealand - do you know it?' The Baroness shook her head, while doing her best to encourage the Doctor. Anyway, dear old Felix kept escaping, making off in stolen fishing boats and building rafts out of sheds. Eventually I think they let him go to prevent him trying 'heir patience any further.'

'Really? What a fascinating anecdote, Doctor.'

' You think so? Felix would no doubt have delivered it with more panache, but I'm not sure he's been born yet. It's just, with you having the same name and him having been a baron, I thought you might be related - perhaps you're his grandmother?'

'No. I do not have any children. That is why I became a guardian to James.'

'Quite right. Every boy needs a guardian angel, someone with their best interests at heart - especially one with such rare gifts as James possesses.'

'I couldn't agree more.'

'Of course, not all are so fortunate in life. Some fall into the clutches of disreputable people. From where was it you rescued James?'

The Baroness stood up sharply. It was clear the Doctor was not the buffoon she had first thought and his idle ramblings were a ruse designed to catch her off guard. If you'll excuse me, I must see how my ward is feeling this morning. He finds a séance quite draining. Good morning to you.' Luckner excused herself from the table.

'I'm sure he does. Perhaps I will visit with him later.'

Once she had gone the Doctor turned to the servants standing behind him, smiling broadly. 'Now, I wonder if there's any chance of having another pair of these delightful kippers?'

Nyssa opened her eyes again. Strange how sometimes sleep played tricks on the unconscious mind. Her mind was telling her she had just laid back down for a moment, trying to rediscover that window on the dream of another. But now, as she looked around the room, Nyssa knew several hours had elapsed. The sunlight had moved across the room and she could hear people passing in the corridor outside. I

should make a note of this, she decided, but could not see the journal in which she had been recording her observations.

Perhaps the Doctor had it. The Doctor - that unlocked a flood of memories and she knew where she was. Judging by the surroundings, they had become guests of Queen Victoria.

This chamber was much larger and grander than her bedroom in the TARDIS, Nyssa observed. It was far more ornate, with elaborate plasterwork across the ceiling and a rich tapestry hung above a fireplace on the wall opposite her bed. Nearby was a three-panelled screen, each section lovingly embroidered with silk threads to resemble the feathers of a peacock. In one corner stood a magnificent walnut wardrobe, accompanied by a matching dresser with mirror. A white bowl stood on the dresser, steam rising from the warm water inside it. Nyssa found she was clad in a white linen nightdress, its sleeves reaching down to her wrists and the bodice buttoned up tightly to her neck. Another memory floated to the surface of her thoughts, an all-pervading smell that clung to the air as though infecting her thoughts, trying to inhabit her reason. Last night's faint had been an involuntary defence mechanism, she decided.

Recently she had experienced a heightened telepathy while in the presence of highly developed alien beings. Was her dreaming visitation an after-effect of that telepathy?

Could her exposure to the Xeraphin have awakened some psychic sensitivity long since dormant in the people of Traken? It was an interesting theory, but one that would have to wait. Nyssa realised she was quite ravenous and the bold sunlight indicated the morning was passing her by. It was time to get out of bed.

Sweeping aside the covers, Nyssa walked to the dresser.

Aside from a bump on her head, she seemed to be suffering no ill effects from her fainting spell. A cloth was ready by the bowl of steaming water, with several pristine towels nearby.

She shed the white gown and began methodically washing herself, the warm liquid reinvigorating her skin. A door opened behind her and Nyssa heard a gasp of astonishment.

A maid had entered and was trying not to stare at the naked woman.

'Hello, I'm Nyssa. What's your name?'

'M-Mary, miss. I'm t-terrible sorry, I d-didn't know you were awake...'

Nyssa wrapped a towel round herself, smiling at the maid's embarrassment. 'There's no need to apologise. I was just taking advantage of this lovely water. Did you put it here?'

'Yes, miss. I could run you a bath if you'd prefer.'

'No, the water was fine, Mary. I'm quite hungry but I need to dress before I can make an appearance. Do you know where my clothes went?'

Mary retrieved Nyssa's gown from the wardrobe and various undergarments from the drawers of the dresser.

'They've all been cleaned and pressed, miss. I made a few repairs to the dress, too. I hope that suits you.'

'That sounds fine. It was a little big for me, anyway. Could you help me put it on? On Traken we don't wear such formal clothes.'

'Of course, miss. Traken - is that on the subcontinent?'

Nyssa was about to correct the young woman but remembered the Doctor's urgings. In some cases total honesty was not always necessary to achieve one's ends.

'Not exactly. It's in another part of the empire,' she replied.

Getting dressed proved to be a lengthy process with Mary insisting Nyssa wear several more undergarments than before. Most cumbersome of these was a metal cage fastened around her waist, apparently called a crinoline. This was covered with several petticoats, so that Nyssa's gown billowed out to twice the width of her hips. The maid seemed to take delight in all the flounces and fabrics, admitting that she had once wanted to become a seamstress. But the death of her father had forced his daughters to go into service.

Mary did not seem to mourn his passing, confiding he had been a bitter, violent man. Finally, Nyssa was ready to venture out into the rest of the castle.

'Where do you think I would find the Doctor?' she asked.

'Do you need a physician, miss?' Mary replied.

'No, my travelling companion, the Doctor - I arrived with him last

night,' Nyssa explained. The maid smiled, despite herself.

Oh, him. That gentleman's been all over the castle, miss.

If you stand still long enough he'll probably find you.'

Nyssa nodded. That certainly sounded like the Doctor. 'In that case, I think some lunch would be best. Can you show me the way?'

Mary shook her head. 'No, miss. My duties restrict me to the bedchambers. If you ask one of the other household servants, they will be happy to escort you.'

It was noon when Lieutenant Ashe finally gave the order for the soldiers to break camp and move upstream. Sergeant Vollmer had been politely urging his commanding officer to set off sooner but Ashe refused to be rushed. Any suspicions Vollmer had about the lieutenant's fragile physical state remained unspoken. Ashe had spent several hours in the company of the Walker brothers, who owned and operated the New Lanark cotton mills. When the lieutenant had staggered back to where the troops were settled, his steps were unsteady and his speech slurred. Vollmer had helped his commanding officer into bed, rather than have the lower ranks see Ashe in such a state.

The contingent was slowly making its way upstream, the sound of rushing water growing steadily until it was a roar ahead of them. Eventually the greenery parted to reveal the source of the cacophony. Ahead stood a mighty stone dam over which fell a steady torrent, the water crashing down the height of three houses to rocks below. Spray bounced up into the air, creating an ever-present rainbow. Vollmer called a halt to their progress, giving him a chance to consult with the lieutenant. 'Is this what we came to guard?'

Ashe shook his head. 'No, our orders take us further upriver, to Corra Linn.' He pointed at the dam. 'Magnificent, isn't it, Sergeant?'

'Yes, sir. But what's it for?'

Ashe began to mop his brow with a white cotton handkerchief. Despite the spray created by the dam's overflow, the air was close and humid. 'Two gentlemen hatched a scheme to create power by damming the river. The Walker brothers explained it to me last night - something involving turbines and steam. Dashed complicated and clever, if you ask me. All very scientific. Anyway, they built the dam and flooded the valley upstream, right back to Corra Linn, but ran out

of money before they could install the equipment to harness this power. Dissolved their partnership and went their separate ways. One of them claimed the project had been cursed and threw himself off the dam - nasty business all round.'

Nearby the men were getting restive. It was time to move on. 'Nights fall quite quickly this far north in February and we need daylight to make camp again.'

'Well, then you should have made certain we set forth a little sooner, shouldn't you, Vollmer?'

'Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. Very sound advice. Now, if you'll give the order?' Within a few minutes the contingent was resuming its journey, now having to climb around the northern edge of the dam to reach higher ground.

After satisfying her hunger, Nyssa found the Doctor consulting a heavy, cloth-bound volume in the castle's extensive library.

'There you are! Fully recovered, I hope?' he asked, peering over the top of his spectacles at her.

'Much better,' Nyssa replied. 'What are you doing?'

'Finding out a little more about Baroness von Luckner. I'm not convinced her credentials are all they could be - aha!' The Doctor read to himself. When Nyssa tried to get his attention he held up a hand to silence her. 'Nearly done... yes. I thought so! There is no Baroness von Luckner.' He snapped the book shut and replaced it on a shelf, folding the spectacles away into a pocket of his frock coat. 'So, she seems to be an impostor.'

'But her ward's abilities are genuine.' Nyssa replied. 'I could have sworn he was speaking in Adric's voice last night.'

'It was - most uncanny. I wonder how?'

'Telepathy - or a form of mental projection, perhaps. We simply thought we heard the voice of Adric. But it seemed more convincing than that.'

'Yes... I feel certain James is involved with that disturbance the TARDIS detected in the space-time continuum. But the question is, how? We need to find out more about this young man.' The Doctor related the Queen's tale of what had taken place at the séance before

gently placing a hand on Nyssa's right shoulder. 'Do you feel strong enough to face James again? There's no guarantee he won't produce another manifestation...'

'I'm ready. Part of it was the surprise - Earth in the nineteenth century is the last place I expected to be haunted by Adric.' Nyssa said. 'What will you be doing?'

The Doctor smiled. think it's time to confront the so-called Baroness. She may be an impostor, but somehow she latched on to a very powerful psychic entity in James. I want to know where she found him - discovering that may answer a lot of my other questions.' just before he left, the Doctor retrieved a slim notebook from a pocket in his coat and handed it to Nyssa. 'I found this on the floor of the Mausoleum after you collapsed last night. I don't think we want such a journal falling into the wrong hands, do we?'

Nyssa accepted his gentle admonishment and went on her way.

Sir Henry Ponsonby stood before the Queen in her private office. 'Your Majesty, I could find no evidence to support this woman's claim to any title. As far as I can ascertain, she does not even bear the name Luckner. A telegram from that noble family in Austria has denied all knowledge of such a relative, by birth or by marriage. She seems to have first appeared several years ago travelling under this name. Not long after that she began to visit the royal courts of Europe, accompanied by the young man.'

The Queen made little effort to hide her unhappiness. 'You are saying this woman is an impostor?'

'Yes, ma'am?

'Yet she has been organising séances, raising the hopes of the recently bereaved...'

'A most regrettable situation, ma'am.'

'What about the boy, what do we know of him? His performance at the séance removed even our doubts. Surely he cannot also be a fraud?'

'Of that we are not certain. Obviously, this young man cannot be held responsible for the conduct of his guardian but their mere association calls into question all that he has said thus far,' the private secretary ventured.

The Queen rose from the desk and began to pace the room, two ladies-in-waiting shadowing her movements. 'This is simply unacceptable,' she announced. 'We will not be taken for a fool. If this woman be proved false, she shall be punished for it. We have never taken her word as having any value. But the young main...' The Queen stopped abruptly.

'Have we received any word from the contingent sent into Scotland to investigate his claims?'

'Not yet, ma'am. The last communication indicated the soldiers should reach their destination later today. The necessary equipment has also been despatched, as per your instructions, and should reach them within a day or two.' Sir Henry hesitated before continuing further. 'If I might be so bold, Your Majesty, General Doulton is less than happy at your intervention in this matter.'

'The general's unhappiness is not our concern. Where is his so-called Baroness?'

'I believe she is resting in her quarters, ma'am?

'Good. We have long wanted to visit that part of the castle.

Have the general meet us there?

Nyssa was returning to her room with the journal when she saw James standing outside on a balcony in the rain. As she approached Nyssa could see a thin stream of blood trickling from his nostrils. She tapped on a glass panel in the balcony doors. James spun round, hurriedly wiping the blood from his face.

'Are you alright?' Nyssa asked.

James opened the doors and stepped inside. His clothes were soaked through and he was shivering. Nyssa took him by the hand and led him to her bedchamber. 'What were you doing out there? You'll catch your death of cold standing in the rain like that.'

'I can't explain it,' James stuttered through chattering teeth. 'Sometimes I... I just don't feel I belong here.'

'At Windsor Castle?' Nyssa asked, tugging on the bell-pull in her room to summon Mary. 'Or do you mean that you feel out of place everywhere?'

'Yes! That's it,' he replied, his eyes coming alive.' I feel that I'd rather die than stay here any more. I have to get back...'

Mary appeared and seemed surprised to find Nyssa entertaining a gentleman in her room. She was even more surprised by Nyssa's request. 'But he should be having a bath in his own chambers, miss, if you don't mind my saying so. It isn't proper that he –'

'I don't care about what's proper, Mary. This young man needs our help and we are going to give it. Now, please, prepare a hot bath for him and fetch some dry clothes for when he has finished.'

'If you say so, miss.' the maid agreed reluctantly.

'If it will make you any happier, he can undress and bathe behind that screen. That way some decorum is maintained!'

'That would be for the best, miss.'

'And not a word of this to anyone else - is that clear?'

Mary just bobbed in a curtsy and went to fetch the hot water. Nyssa went back to James, who was still shivering near a window. 'You were saying you have to get back, James - to where are you trying to return?'

'The spirit world. I went there once, when I was just a boy.

It was wondrous, a place of great joy and happiness. I met all those from my family who had died and passed over to the Other Side. I never wanted to come back...' His words broke down.

'What was it like - this spirit world?'

'It's impossible to describe. I haven't got the words, not as would do it justice.'

'Please try.'

James nodded. Imagine a place more beautiful than you've ever seen, a home you never knew you had - that's what it was like, like being home - only better. You felt like you belonged. It was, well, heavenly. But you didn't play the harp or float on clouds or anything of those things preachers talk about. I felt loved and wanted, like I'd never known before.' He fell silent again, his face enraptured by the recollections.

'What happened?'

'I was pulled back to this world. My brothers thought they were rescuing me, they thought I was drowning. Somehow they pulled me back to this life. When they did, I could still hear the voices in my head - the voices of all those from the spirit world. When I met someone new, I found myself speaking with the voices of their dead.'

'Some would consider that a blessing.' Nyssa suggested.

'It's cursed my life. Ever since that day I've been punished for what I can do. My mother and the local doctor had me committed to an asylum in Glasgow.' James pulled back his thick, damp hair to reveal a patch of scalp on one side where no hair grew. Livid scar tissue jagged across the skin. 'If the spirit world was like heaven, I know where hell is - and its name is the Lock.'

Baroness von Luckner was not surprised when the Doctor appeared at her door. She might not possess the remarkable abilities of her ward, but she could sense when trouble was coming. At breakfast this mysterious stranger had given her warning of his suspicions. No doubt he had since uncovered at least part of the truth, making a second encounter inevitable. She was just irritated that it had come so soon, before she could make good her departure from the royal residence. Packing away her gowns and belongings had taken longer than she expected without assistance from one of the servants.

'Leaving so soon?' the Doctor said. He pulled open the lid of the trunk to reveal the clothes inside, along with two solid silver picture frames and several other carefully chosen and quite expensive items. 'And I see you were taking some souvenirs with you. Presents from a grateful Queen, perhaps?'

'Yes. You can go and ask her yourself, if you like.' Luckner suggested.

'That will not be necessary,' an imperious voice replied.

The Queen was standing in the doorway, glaring at the two of them. 'We are already here.'

'Your Majesty,' the Doctor began, bowing deeply. 'believe this woman is an impostor. She is certainly no Baroness and as for being a Luckner...' He gestured at the stolen items sitting atop the trunk's contents. 'That is a noble family name and not one usually associated with petty theft.'

'Thank you, Doctor, we are already aware of this woman's duplicity,' Victoria said, sweeping into the room, followed by her ladies-in-waiting and General Doulton. 'Perhaps she would like to tell us her real name and the purpose behind this falsehood?'

The impostor sagged into a chair, her head bowed, the fight gone from her limbs. 'Walker. Mrs Sylvia Walker,' she admitted, her cultured tones and Germanic accent replaced by those of a Londoner born and bred.

'Did we give you permission to sit in our presence?'

Victoria asked haughtily.

Mrs Walker stood up again, not daring to lift her gaze from the floor. 'Sorry, Your Majesty, I didn't... Sorry.'

'Your apologies are neither here nor there, woman - we want the truth!' The Queen summoned Doulton to her side. 'If you are unwilling to divulge it, we will happily pass you over to others. You may be assured that they will not stint in their efforts to find the truth.'

The Doctor stepped into the fray, bowing his head to the Queen. 'Your Majesty, I do not believe such tactics will be necessary. Before you arrived I was about to question this woman about her deception. Would you let me continue?'

Victoria nodded her acquiescence. She raised an eyebrow at the general who quickly fetched her a chair. Once seated, the Queen signalled for the Doctor to resume his questions.

'When I arrived, you were preparing to leave - why?' he asked Mrs Walker.

'The jig was up and I knew it. Decided it were time to get out while I still could.'

'How long have you been maintaining this facade?'

'This what?'

'How long have you been pretending to be Baroness Von Luckner?'

'Three years now. Y'see, I'm an actress - least, I used to be. Did well on the London stage too, but I was getting old for that. I read about this woman who pretended to be part of a noble family. She had been

caught out but I knew I could carry it off, being an actress and all. So instead of Mrs Sylvia Walker I became the Baroness - it's amazing what you can get away with if you're all high and mighty, playing at being Lady Muck.' Mrs Walker paled as she remembered in whose presence she was standing. 'Sorry, Your Majesty.' The Queen waved away her concern and the impostor continued. 'I started doing the rounds of all the nobility, blending in and learning how to play the toff. Nobody ever questions you when you've got a title, they wouldn't dare. Soon I could walk into any salon or garden party and pretend to be Baroness Von Luckner, treating the servants like dirt and taking everything I could carry. The rich don't need to steal, so I was never suspected!

The Doctor nodded. 'When did you first encounter your ward?'

Mrs Walker shivered, fear suddenly making her cold. 'Two years ago, in Scotland. I was visiting stately homes north of the border. One host near Glasgow suggested a tour of an asylum for the insane, a pleasant day out taking pity on those less fortunate than ourselves. That's where I first saw him.'

* * *

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: I pressed James for more details about his past while he took a hot bath, concealed behind the screen in my room. He said the Lock was a hospital for women with sexually transmitted diseases. 'But the cures were worse than the diseases. The doctors gave the women mercury to swallow as a treatment.'

I protested that would be far worse than whatever ailment it was meant to cure, and probably caused death in many of the patients.

'The women who died that way were the lucky ones,'

James replied. 'Others were suspended over heated baths of mercury, so the vapours would burn out the infection. That wasn't all it burnt out. I could hear them screaming from my cell when the treatments were taking place'

I was aghast at such barbarism. Anyone administering such treatments was a monster, not a physician. I demanded James tell me who conceived such horrors.

'Doctors, all good men and true. When the women went mad they were moved to the asylum. It was my job to tend them. They lost their

noses and their teeth. The flesh was rotting from their bodies. The smell, it clung to the walls like a shroud' His voice trailed off, unable to cope with the memories any longer. 'Every evening the ghosts of all those who died in the Lock used to gather around me in the dark. I had to keep a candle lit through the night to stop them appearing. The burn on my scalp, that was from the hot mercury. Three times I tried to escape but they always caught me. Once I got all the way back to the village where I grew up. I was determined to find the gateway to the spirit world again, or die trying. It couldn't be worse than the Lock. Years had passed since I was sent away. In the meantime, the valley below Corra Linn had been flooded. I almost drowned trying to swim down to the portal but it was too deep for me.

Someone found my body and sent me back to the asylum.

Every time the doctor in charge came near me I started speaking in the voices of the women he had tortured and killed with his cure. To shut me up he held my face over the bubbling liquid. One of the bubbles burst and the mercury splashed against my head, burning into my scalp'

I found myself unable to speak, such was the horror of James's recollections. What he had been through - it was astounding he was still sane. Eventually I asked how he finally got free of the Lock.

It was hellish in that place, let me tell you,' Mrs Walker recalled. 'Gave me nightmares for weeks afterwards. What they were doing to those poor women - it weren't right. The doctors, they kept children there too. They boasted about using the children to cure visiting male patients who had been infected, how virgins could remove the disease. One of the boys was James. He must have been thirteen or so at the time. I couldn't see why he was being kept there. Then he shook my hand...'

The Doctor had been listening to her story carefully. 'And began speaking with the voice of someone who had died?'

Mrs Walker nodded vigorously. 'My husband, Bill. He passed over years ago, knocked down by a runaway carriage. Him dying was the reason I went back on the stage, only decent way I knew to support meself. This boy, he starts talking to me with Bill's voice, saying as how he was in a happier place and all. I thought it must be a trick but James did the same thing to the next person he meets, calling up the spirit of their dead niece.'

'So you adopted the boy as your ward, planning to use him as a distraction. You robbed the bereaved while James talked in the voices of their dearly departed?'

Mrs Walker nodded, shamefaced. The Queen stood up.

'We have heard enough. This woman deserves the sternest of punishments for these crimes'

Doulton nodded. 'And her accomplice?'

Victoria wavered, apparently unsure of what to do. She turned to the Doctor. 'What do you suggest?'

'I would not be so quick to judge,' he replied. Mrs Walker may be all the things said of her here, but I believe there is more to James than meets the eye. If Your Majesty would permit me, I should like to study him - to ascertain whether or not he possesses the abilities claimed for him'

Victoria nodded. It is agreed. Doctor, you have a day to make your assessment and report back to us. The young man will be your responsibility during that time. General, have this impostor removed from the residence. Mrs Walker, we strongly suggest you maintain a healthy silence about the events you have witnessed here in the past few days - is that understood?'

The impostor just nodded.

'Good. If you keep that silence, we will look favourably upon granting you clemency. If you tell others what has happened here, we shall ensure you spend the rest of your days behind bars' The Queen swept from the room, the audience at an end.

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: I listened carefully as James recalled travelling around Europe with the Baroness, performing like a circus act for the crowned heads of different nations. When he emerged fully dressed from behind the screen, I asked him a question that had been nagging at me. 'Last night, when you began speaking with Adric's voice - how did it feel?'

'You want to know if that was real, don't you? That's what everybody wants to know - am I truly creating a channel between them and the dead? The worst part is I don't know.

Perhaps I am just telling you what you want to know, what you need

to hear, giving you some comfort. But it feels more than that to me. It seems real' His face was warm and alive again. 'What do you believe?'

I admitted to the ulterior motive for my question, saying I had lost someone else who was close to me. I was careful not to say too much so James had a chance to prove the truth behind his words. His face fell at my request.

`Nyssa, you don't know what you're asking. Every time I reach out to the spirit world, a fragment of me dies - like someone is forcing splinters of glass into my brain'

`The nosebleeds...'

Ì never used to suffer them. Now it's after every episode, every séance. My head begins pounding and I feel a great blackness rushing towards me. It's terrifying'

I pointed out the contradiction of such fears. If James believed he had visited the spirit world, why should he fear death? Did he not already know what lay beyond this life?

Èvery living thing fears death,' James explained, 'it's a natural reaction to facing your own mortality. Even though I believe in the spirit world, the thought of dying still terrifies me. What if I don't make it to Heaven? What if the creator of us all cannot forgive me for the things I have done?'

`Such as aiding and abetting a thief called Mrs Sylvia Walker,' the Doctor interjected, striding into the bedchamber.

`The Baroness has been unmasked as an impostor and is being taken away. But you already knew that, didn't you?'

James nodded. 'I could sense her distress'

Ì don't doubt it for a minute,' the Doctor said. 'You have several remarkable talents - an empathic ability to read people's emotions, perhaps even their minds. Mimicry of voices you have never heard, that is quite rare. But speaking with the dead...'

`You don't believe I can do that?' James asked. I turned to the Doctor, eager to hear his thoughts about what we had witnessed so far.

'I'm not sure,' he said. The Queen has given me a day to decide whether or not you can be trusted. So let's start at the beginning. Tell

me when and how you first discovered these talents of yours'

It was dusk when the soldiers finished establishing their encampment near Corra Linn. Vollmer insisted on posting guards to keep watch through the night. 'Surely that isn't necessary, is it?' the lieutenant had asked. 'It took us most of a day to travel two miles upstream to reach this point. I don't think it likely we'll be facing any resistance from the natives!'

Ashe laughed at his own joke, despite the glowering face of his sergeant.

'Posting guards is standard procedure in such circumstances,' Vollmer replied. 'We are in unknown territory with an uncertain mission and no way of knowing what, if any, threats we might be facing. Basic precautions are designed to protect us from such unknowns, sir.'

'Well, if you insist, Sergeant,' Ashe eventually agreed. 'If any of these unknown threats wants me, I shall be snoring gently in my tent. A good night to you'

'And to you, sir.' Vollmer selected three pairs of men for sentry duty, each to stand guard for three hours. 'Keep your eyes and ears open, and your mouths shut. We don't know what we're dealing with here, so stay alert. Johnson And Hawthorne, you take first watch. If anything untoward happens, fetch me first and the lieutenant second - got that?'

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: The Doctor waited until dark before going back to the TARDIS to fetch equipment. I watched for his return from my bedchamber, Mary keeping me company. The maid had insisted on staying as James had fallen asleep on my bed.

'You must have a chaperone, miss. If one of the senior staff were to walk in and find the two of you unaccompanied in here - think of the damage to your reputation!'

The moral strictures of this era seemed quaint and prosaic, but that is how these people live and so it should be respected. My father had often spoken of the need to recognise the value of the beliefs and opinions of others. You could never understand the reasons why somebody acted as they did until you could see any situation from their point of view - as well as your own.

Mary was first to see the Doctor returning, a heavy box clutched under

his right arm. A few minutes later he had found his way back to my bedchamber. He began sorting through the equipment inside his box. 'Mary, could you wake James please? And Nyssa, perhaps you could help me get all this ready.'

I studied the items the Doctor had brought back from the TARDIS, a haphazard mixture of life-sign monitors, electrographic pulse counter and energy-monitoring systems.

Finding no rhyme or reason to this assortment, I asked his intentions.

‘I am going to hypnotise James and regress him to the moment when he believes he went to the Other Side. We will be able to monitor the event to see how it impacts on the space-time continuum.’

Mary was uneasy at becoming part of this plan, expressing her fears at being confronted by the ghost of her late father.

She volunteered to stand outside in the corridor and alert us if anyone was approaching.

The Doctor smiled reassuringly at her. 'That's fine, Mary.

There's no guarantee we will succeed or even that James will summon forth any dead spirits, but I wouldn't dream of forcing you to witness something like this.'

Mary admitted there was a page called Michael stationed at the end of the corridor who was smitten with her. ‘I will talk to him for a while and keep watch for you.’

When she was gone, the Doctor turned to James. 'What I said to Mary applies just as much to you - I have no wish to force you into this. For the hypnotic regression to succeed, you must be a willing participant. There is a risk involved. If your spirit is drawn to this world you describe, there is no guarantee I will be able to bring it back.'

I asked what effect that would have, to which the Doctor said he wasn't sure.

‘If the link was broken, James's body would remain here while his spirit was left to wander between worlds. He might become one of the ghosts that apparently possess him.’

James agreed to take part. 'I need answers'

The Doctor began setting up his equipment. He asked me to monitor the results. 'Once we begin, I cannot let my concentration lapse for a moment. If it does, both James and I could suffer the same fate.'

Private Eric Hawthorne had joined the army from no great desire to serve his Queen or country, and certainly without any plans to sacrifice his life for anyone else. He simply wanted to escape prison for petty theft and a dozen other offences. The presiding magistrate at his trial had offered him a stark choice - two years' hard labour or service with the armed forces. 'Hard work and discipline, that's what the likes of you need - it'll make a man out of you!'

With those words still ringing in his ears Hawthorne had signed up for a seven-year stretch in an infantry unit. The pay was decent enough and there seemed little danger of having to dodge a bullet or a bayonet while stationed at Aldershot.

Best of all, Hawthorne soon found his light-fingered ways and eye for an opportunity, legal or otherwise, made him a valuable asset to his brothers in arms. If anyone needed anything, Hawthorne could procure it - for a price, of course.

This lucrative sideline was providing an ample secondary income for the sly-faced private. He had tried to trade his way off this expedition north of the border but bloody Sergeant Vollmer had been having none of it. God preserve us from virtuous men, Hawthorne thought grumpily as he tapped out the contents of his pipe and ground the embers under his boot.

It was close to the end of his stint on guard and the sooner he could get his head down for a few hours' sleep, the happier Hawthorne would be. Sharing the post with Johnson had not made the sentry duty pass any faster. Nicholas had only joined up a few weeks before and was twitchier than a rat in a cheesemonger's shop. He jumped at every sound, hissing, 'Who goes there?' at the surrounding trees. In a forest filled with badgers, birds and other animals, nocturnal noises were only to be expected - but Johnson reacted to each and every one. Hawthorne had contemplated knocking his partner unconscious just to get some peace.

The moon was directly overhead and Hawthorne decided enough was enough. It was time to wake up the next pair of sentries and get some sleep himself. The sound of a branch cracking underfoot nearby sent Johnson into another spasm of nervous readiness. 'Who goes there?' he hissed for the nineteenth time.

`Nobody bloody goes there,' Hawthorne snarled, unable to contain his frustration any more. 'It'll be a fox or a deer wandering about. Now let's pack it in for the night.'

Johnson shook his head. `No, Thorny, I saw something!'

`For the love of Christ, you've said that a dozen times already,' the older soldier snarled. 'There's nothing out there'

`There it is again!' Johnson was pointing now, his finger and hand shaking, terror clearly visible in his face.

Hawthorne rolled his eyes and turned to look where the nineteen-year-old was pointing. There was something in the distance. A human figure was walking through the trees, down towards the water. 'Who the bloody hell is that?'

Hawthorne whispered.

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: The Doctor put James into a trance with remarkable ease. I monitored their progress via the equipment the Doctor had retrieved from the TARDIS. James's life signs were -relaxed, his breathing calm and measured, his brainwaves like those of most humans at rest. The Doctor began leading James back through his experiences - travelling with Mrs Walker, his attempt to get back to the Other Side, his years at the Lock.

After twenty minutes of careful work, the Doctor had regressed James to the day where he first began to experience links with the spirit world.

`You are swimming in the river when you see a light -what happens next?'

A shadow crossed James's face as he answered. 'I think it might be a coin on the bottom of the river. I dive down towards the glint. I want to get it before John or Josiah see it.

John will only take it from me and spend it, but I want it for my own...'

`But it isn't a coin, is it?'

`No. The closer I get, the more I can see. It's a light, like glimpsing the sun through a gap in black clouds. But the further down I swim, the

greater the pressure is getting on my ears and eyes. I feel like my lungs are going to burst, but I keep going...'

'What happens as you reach the light?'

I stretch my hand forwards to it, my fingertips straining to touch it. I expect the light to be cold but instead it's warm, washing over my fingers, across my hand and now it's moving up my arm. I realise the light isn't moving - I'm falling into it. I panic, but can't stop myself. Just white light all around me...' The young man fell silent, his features warmed by candles illuminating the bedchamber.

'Where are you now, James?' the Doctor asked gently.

I'm walking across a bridge. I look back and see the river behind me but I don't want to go back there any more. Ahead I see someone approaching - it's my grandfather. He smiles and I run towards him. He hugs me, just like he used to do. I tell my grandfather he is dead but he just laughs. I don't have to worry about things like that any more, I'm on the Other Side. I look down and realise the bridge has disappeared.'

'What can you see, James?'

Everything is so beautiful, so peaceful and quiet. I meet my sisters, the babies my mother had Dr Kirkhope get rid of before they were born. They say I'm going to like it on the Other Side. They want to give me a present. But something is wrong, very wrong...'

Hawthorne found himself running down the steep slope after Johnson, trying to keep pace with the younger man.

'Johnson! Johnson, slow down!'

I can't! They're getting away - I can't let them get away!'

The other soldier raced onwards, careering down the hillside without care or caution. He threw his rifle to one side and began tearing off his uniform.

'Sweet Jesus, Nicholas, what are you doing?' Hawthorne stopped his descent by grabbing hold of a tree trunk, before his own legs ran away with him.

'They're calling for me! Can't you hear them, Thorny?'

They're calling for me!

Hawthorne carefully made his way down the remainder of the slope to the water's edge where Johnson was removing the last of his uniform. 'Johnson! Johnson, put your clothes back on! You'll get us both up on a charge if Vollmer catches you!'

Nicholas Johnson was hardly listening. He could see his three brothers standing on the opposite shoreline, all smiling and beckoning him across. It's my brothers! They're over there!

Hawthorne peered across the expanse of water. 'I can't see anything.'

'They're right there - Aidan, Sean and Andy - they're still alive! We got telegrams saying they were missing, presumed dead, but the army was wrong!' Nicholas waved back to his brothers. 'I'm coming, I'm coming!' He was about to jump in when Hawthorne dragged him back from the water's edge.

'For the love of God, will you snap out of it?' Hawthorne slapped Johnson across the face twice. 'There is nobody there!' He pointed across the water as the moon reappeared from behind a bank of dark cloud.

Nicholas was dismayed to see Hawthorne was right.

'They'll just be hiding behind the bushes or something, larking about as usual. I'll soon find them -'

'Johnson! Hawthorne! What the hell are you two doing?'

Vollmer strode down the hillside with a face like thunder, still pulling on his uniform. He stopped a few feet away and looked at the discarded clothes. 'Well?'

Johnson looked down at himself and was horrified to discover he was nude. What the hell had he been doing? He turned to Eric for reassurance. Hawthorne was rubbing the back of his neck, a sheepish look on his face.

'Well, Sergeant, we were standing guard as you ordered and young Johnson here thought he observed an intruder.'

The individual took flight and we, err, gave pursuit, chasing them down here.'

Vollmer folded his arms and arched an eyebrow 'That still doesn't explain why Johnson is stark bollock naked while his rifle is halfway back up the hill.'

'Very true, that's very true. Well, umm, we -'

'It was my brothers,' Nicholas interjected.

'Your brothers?'

'Yes, Sergeant. I saw them on the other side of the water and I was going to swim across to join them.'

'Johnson, I happen to know your brothers all died in the Crimea.'

'Yes, Sergeant.'

'So how could they turn up here in Scotland?'

'I don't know, Sergeant.'

Vollmer sighed heavily. Now I don't know what you two have been getting up to but mark my words - one more step out of line and I'll have you cleaning latrines for the next five years. Is that clear?'

'Yes, Sergeant,' Johnson and Hawthorne mumbled in unison.

'Is that clear?' Vollmer bellowed.

'Yes, Sergeant!' the privates shouted back, snapping to attention.

'That's better. Hawthorne, you can remain on sentry duty for the rest of the night. Johnson, you can get some rest, you obviously need it more than the rest of us. But may I suggest you put your clothes back on before returning to camp. We don't want tongues wagging now, do we?'

'No, Sergeant' Nicholas blushed with embarrassment and began picking up his discarded uniform as Vollmer marched away, cursing quietly. Hawthorne helped him find all the bits and pieces thrown aside in the rush to catch up with his brothers. Even now, in the glint of the moonlight, Johnson thought he could see something moving under the water. No, it was probably just a reflection, something shining dully beneath the surface...

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: No sooner had James's mood changed than I noticed a sudden surge in his life signs.

'Doctor, you should hurry.

James's blood pressure just surged upwards and his pulse almost doubled at the same time. Plus I'm reading some unusual energy fluctuations.'

The Doctor nodded. 'James, listen to me, I need you to be calm. You're perfectly safe, nothing can happen to you -'

`No, something's wrong!'

The energy levels doubled, then trebled within seconds.

`Doctor, you've got to get him out from the hypnosis - now!'

`James, I want you to come back to the present,' the Doctor said, his voice soothing and quietly insistent. `Retrace your steps over the bridge'

`No, stay back from me!' the young man shouted, beads of sweat forming on his forehead. 'Let me go!'

The Doctor reached forward towards James. 'You must listen to me -'

But James slapped the Doctor away, his eyes wild with rage and fear. 'Get away from me! I won't let you take me!'

One by one the monitors began to overload, showering the room with sparks and broken glass as display units shattered.

I threw myself backwards to escape the explosions, still watching the cause of all this. James stood up - but at the same time his body remained seated, twitching and convulsing, blood gushing from both nostrils. The standing figure was translucent, a figure comprised of glowing energy.

It reached towards the Doctor, fingers curling into a talon-like grasp.

`No!' I screamed. 'Leave him alone!'

The apparition turned its attention towards me.

Mary was sharing a joke with Michael at the end of the corridor when Sir Henry Ponsonby strode into view. `Haven't either of you duties you should be performing?' he demanded.

Mary stepped away from the page, mortified at being caught in such a

compromising position. 'We were just -'

I am quite aware of what you were just doing. Be thankful I came round that corner and not Her Majesty!

Mary curtsied deeply and backed away towards Nyssa's bedchamber. 'If you'll excuse me, Sir Henry...'

He dismissed her with a gesture, shifting his attention to the red-faced Michael. 'I am looking for a guest of Her Majesty, a man called the Doctor. Have you seen him?'

Michael's eyes flashed past Sir Henry's face to the retreating Mary. She desperately signalled for him to deny all knowledge. 'I'm sorry, Sir Henry, but -'

'Sorry? You will be when I've finished with you. Now go to my office and stay there. I will deal with you presently!'

Mary had reached the door and rapped on it three times.

'Lady Nyssa - Doctor - it's Mary! You should -' Her words were cut short by a ghastly scream from inside the bedchamber. Mary stumbled back from the door as the wood bulged outwards at her, the features of a face straining to escape the grain.

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: The figure of light moved towards me, sliding through the equipment between us. As it got closer, a stench of burning sugar assaulted my senses. I scrambled backwards but a wall behind me prevented any escape. The apparition reached forwards, about to touch my face.

'Nyssa, think of your father!' the Doctor shouted. Think of Tremas!

I can't! I cried, unable to tear my gaze away from the creature looming over me.

'Close your eyes, Nyssa - picture his face in front of you!'

Fighting every instinct in my being, I forced my eyes shut and tried to conjure up images of my father. I opened my eyes again and saw him reaching towards me, his eyes kindly and warm. 'Come to me, my child.' The voice was full of affection and love, a voice I had thought I would never hear again. My father Tremas stood before me, his gentle hands held out, waiting for me to embrace him.

`Doctor?'

`You're safe now, Nyssa - that spirit won't harm you,' he replied.

The creature of glowing light had been replaced by a being of flesh and blood, as solid as any mortal. I got up and threw myself into my father's arms, hugging him with all my strength. I had missed him so much, more than I had realised. 'Never let me go again,' I begged him.

`Lady Nyssa has been having bad dreams, Sir Henry,' Mary said, her back pressed against the bedchamber door. 'She asked me to make sure she wasn't disturbed, in the hope she would get a good night's sleep'

Ponsonby scoffed at this. 'Stand aside! I wish to see the truth for myself.'

Mary refused to budge. 'I'm sorry, sir, but it wouldn't be right to allow a married man into Lady Nyssa's bedchamber at this time of night'

‘I am the Queen's private secretary and you will do as I command! Stand aside!’

Mary finally acceded to his demand. Once she was out of the way Ponsonby rapped on the door with his knuckles.

`Lady Nyssa, this is Sir Henry Ponsonby - may I come in?' he called.

When no reply came, he knocked more firmly on the door.

'Lady Nyssa, can you hear me? Is everything all right in there?' Ponsonby tried the handle but the door seemed to be locked from the inside. He stooped to peer through the keyhole.

`Sir Henry!' Mary exclaimed in shock. Lady Nyssa may be undressed!'

He glared at her. 'Go and fetch that page. I may require his assistance to break down this door.'

Mary scampered away, trying to recall the quickest way to Sir Henry's office. She had done her best. Whatever happened now, she could not be blamed. Behind her the private secretary resumed banging on the door. 'Lady Nyssa, can you hear me?'

Another scream burst from the room, but this time it was the strangled cry of a man's voice. Sir Henry redoubled his efforts to open the door.

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: James cried out in agony, his figure twitching and convulsing.

My father and I watched as the Doctor examined the young man. 'He is dying - heartbeat highly irregular, hardly breathing at all. I think the strain is becoming too much for him.' The Doctor stood up and looked at my father. 'Tremas, I'm sorry but...'

'I understand, Doctor,' my father replied.

From outside the bedchamber I could hear someone

, 'flouting and the door being thumped repeatedly. Understand what?' I asked. 'What's going on?'

My father placed his hands on my shoulders. 'Nyssa, I must go now I can't stay here any longer.'

'Please don't go - I can't stand to lose you again,' I pleaded.

'You know I can't stay, my child. If I remain here James will die - you don't want him to die for me, do you?'

'No, of course not. But why does -'

'James is sacrificing his life force to sustain your father's presence here, Nyssa,' the Doctor said quietly. 'Tremas is right - you have to let him go now'

'Please, I can't - you don't know what you're asking!' I begged.

'Yes, I do. Every time one of my friends dies, I have to let them go - just like I did with Adric. Every time one of my travelling companions leaves the TARDIS, I have to let them go - just as I did with Tegan. One day you will leave me too, Nyssa, and when that day comes I will let you go. Now you must do the same with your father.'

'No. .. no...' I sobbed.

'Please, Nyssa,' Tremas said, but the words were coming from James's mouth. I looked down into the young man's eyes, saw the deathly pallor of his skin and knew he was right. I stepped back from my father, out of his reach.

'Goodbye, father,' I whispered.

'Goodbye, Nyssa,' he replied, already fading back into a creature of

translucent light, burning candles behind him becoming visible through his shape. 'Don't cry, my child, we shall meet again - on the Other Side...' Then the light shrank into a ball of glowing energy, hovering a few feet above the ground, before merging back into James's body. The young man convulsed once more, his face contorted in agony, and then he lay still, no sound audible but shouting from outside the bedchamber.

'Is he still alive?'

The Doctor bent over James's body and listened for a heartbeat. Yes - just.'

'Lady Nyssa, can you hear me? It's Sir Henry Ponsonby!'

'Just a moment, Sir Henry!' I called back before whispering to the Doctor, 'What should I do?'

'Just don't let him in here. We could never explain this in a way he'd understand.'

Mary was running down the corridor towards Nyssa's bedchamber, accompanied by Michael. 'Sir Henry, wait!'

'There you are at last,' Ponsonby replied. 'Young man, I will forget your earlier transgression if you can break down this door.'

'I'll do my best sir,' Michael replied. 'If you'll move aside...'

Just as Michael was about to charge down the door, it opened a fraction to reveal the sleepy face of Nyssa.

'What is all the noise out here? I thought I heard people shouting,' she said, stifling a yawn. One hand clutched a bedsheet around her chest, her naked shoulders visible above the crisp white fabric.

'Lady Nyssa, are you of sound mind and body?' Ponsonby asked.

'Yes, of course. Did I call out in my sleep again? I'm sorry if I disturbed anyone,' she replied innocently.

'We heard screams coming from your bedchamber - one sounded like a man'

'Really? Well, I can assure you there are no men in my bedchamber. You can come in if you like...' Nyssa offered, beginning to hold open the door, 'but I am not dressed' The top of her bedsheet slipped

slightly downwards for a moment, allowing Sir Henry a glimpse of more naked flesh, halting his eager advance towards the doorway. Blushing crimson, he, hurriedly averted his gaze.

'Please, Lady Nyssa, have a care!'

She smiled sweetly. 'I can be dressed in a few minutes if you would allow Mary to assist me. Otherwise it may take a little longer.'

'That will not be necessary,' the private secretary replied. 'I shall bid you a good night's rest. Do not hesitate to call for help if you should require it!'

Nyssa nodded. 'Good night, Sir Henry.' She watched him stride away.

Mary almost fainted, such was her relief at averting disaster. Lady Nyssa, you shouldn't go playing with fire like that. Sir Henry is not a man to be trifled with'

'Thank you for the warning, Mary,' she replied. 'If you'll excuse me, I have some tidying up to do in here. I'll see you in the morning' Nyssa closed the door quietly and locked it again from the inside.

Mary turned to find Michael still beside her, his mouth agape at what he had just witnessed. 'And as for you! Quit your gawping and get back to work!'

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: By the time I had sent Sir Henry away, the Doctor had shifted James on to my bed and was giving him a more thorough examination. I slipped my arms back into the sleeves of my dress and pulled the fabric back up over my shoulders, refastening the buttons up to my neck. Decency restored, I joined the Doctor at the bedside. 'How is he?'

'His breathing is shallow and his pulse sluggish, but I think he will recover. It is fortunate James is still young -the strain of maintaining that manifestation would have killed anyone older.' The Doctor peered at me in the dim candlelight. 'How about you - no ill effects?'

'Nothing physical,' I said. Tricking Sir Henry had been a welcome diversion but the crushing reality of losing my father again quickly began to weigh heavily on me. 'Doctor - my father - was that real?'

'Did it feel real to you?'

'Yes, but... My heart tells me I was hugging my father, but my head

tells me that cannot be. My father is dead, yet he was alive again in this room. How is that possible?'

'The universe is a strange and wonderful place, Nyssa.

Even I don't understand or know everything about it and I have been alive for hundreds of years. If I could live for a millennia of millennia, I still doubt I would have seen or known all there is to know'

'I don't care about all of that,' I admitted. 'I need to know whether that was my father.'

'Yes, it was - as far as all our perceptions could see.' The Doctor looked regretfully at the shattered equipment strewn about the floor of the bedchamber. 'Alas, all the monitors had already been overloaded before Tremas appeared, so our own perceptions are all we have to go on for now.' He fingered the celery on his coat's lapel. 'Victoria is expecting my report on James's abilities by noon. That gives us less than twelve hours to extract what data we can from these instruments and deduce what just happened. I have my suspicions but I would like to have evidence.'

Once we had tidied the room, the Doctor set to work examining his shattered instruments while I wrote this account into my journal. A good observer should always note what they have seen while the experience is still fresh in their mind - at least, that's what my father used to tell me. It seems strange but I feel closer to him now than I ever did when he was alive. Perhaps I appreciate him more. Whatever the case, I will give the Doctor until dawn to finish his investigations, then I have a few questions he must answer.

Chapter Three

February 16, 1863

Dawn brought an unhappy awakening for Johnson. The private was nudged into consciousness by the gleaming left boot of Sergeant Vollmer. The glowering veteran suggested Johnson and Hawthorne report to him fully dressed and ready for duty within five minutes or else suffer the consequences. 'If you think I am joking, Johnson, ask your fellow private about my sense of humour.' The sergeant departed the tent and Hawthorne walked in, yawning after spending all night

on patrol.

The weary soldier said Vollmer didn't have a sense of humour. Leastways, not so as I've ever noticed. He's a stickler for just about everything and everything in its place.

But as far as he's concerned, having a laugh isn't part of army life'

'Charming,' Johnson said bleakly.

'I don't see what you're complaining about, you're the one who got us into Vollmer's bad books, running off down the hill like that. What were you playing at?'

'I... I thought I saw my brothers. Just imagined it, I guess -

unless they were ghosts. But what would they be doing here?'

'Ours is not to reason why, young Nicholas, ours is just to do or die,' Hawthorne said. 'Or in my case, to avoid doing or dying as much as humanly possible. Now come on - the sergeant will have our arses boiled for breakfast if we're late.'

He pushed Johnson out of the tent into the chill morning air, a few weak beams of sunshine breaking through gaps in the trees. Winter had robbed much of the surrounding forest of its leaves, just barren branches reaching outwards like spindly fingers. Hawthorne followed the younger private outside, the sharp cold catching at his throat and making him cough.

'Crikey, it's perishing out here!'

'Johnson! Hawthorne! Where are you two good-for-nothings?' Vollmer bellowed from the far edge of the encampment. The pair grabbed their rifles and set off towards the sergeant's voice, slinging the weapons over their shoulders as they walked. The privates found Vollmer standing on a small plateau overlooking the camp, talking with Lieutenant Ashe. 'These are the two men, sir,' the sergeant explained. 'Hand-picked for the job'

'Very good, Vollmer,' Ashe replied, smiling benignly as he returned a salute from the new arrivals. 'Now men, I received a message this morning, sent via the good offices of the Walker brothers at New Lanark. Apparently two crates of equipment to aid us are at the railway station in Lanark.'

Obviously, these need to be collected and brought back here.

As I understand it, the consignment is very heavy and cumbersome. Getting it back to this remote location will not be easy, but I've entrusted the task to Sergeant Vollmer. He tells me you both personally volunteered to help. Is that correct?'

Both privates snapped into another salute. Absolutely, sir!"

Hawthorne shouted back for good measure. He found most officers responded well when he shouted and saluted, as if that showed them extra respect. The sergeant was not so easily beguiled.

As he seemed satisfied with this response. 'Very good.

Well, carry on then, Sergeant. I'll get the rest of the men 10

start work on constructing the wooden jetty over the water.'

The lieutenant sauntered away, breathing deeply of the crisp, clean air.

Once Ashe was out of earshot, Vollmer leaned into the Faces of his two helpers and grinned. 'When the lieutenant told me about this little job, I wasn't sure which poor sods I should choose for it. But since your midnight escapade interrupted a rather pleasant dream I had been having, I felt sure you wouldn't mind being volunteered'

'Thank you, sir! Very kind of you!' Hawthorne shouted.

'Indeed it is. In fact, I'm beginning to wonder if perhaps I do have a sense of humour after all,' the sergeant said cheerfully. 'Well, what are you waiting for? Get yourselves down that trail, you horrible little tearaways! Double time -

move!"

Sir Henry Ponsonby was up before the sun that day, his slumbers troubled by too many questions. He knew the Queen was holding back from him, keeping information to herself. She had taken to sending despatches without letting him see the contents first. At least one such missive had gone to a commander within the Royal Navy. And then there was this business with the impostor and her ward. Bad enough Her Majesty was duped into allowing these charlatans an audience, but the woman seemed intent on believing this lad's claims.

Last but not least among Ponsonby's concerns were these latest arrivals, the Doctor and his companion. Lady Nyssa's behaviour the previous evening was unconventional to say the least. But her companion was the greater worry. This fellow seemed to have no references and no legal authority.

He had appeared from nowhere, claiming some vague involvement with Scotland Yard, and been accepted as if he were an old friend.

Determined to learn the truth, Sir Henry dressed and went to the Doctor's bedchamber. He knocked repeatedly on the door but received no reply. Finally he opened the door and looked inside, to discover the room was empty and the bed undisturbed. Could the Doctor have departed during the night? Ponsonby made his way to Lady Nyssa's quarters, in a different corridor of the castle. He was approaching the bedchamber when he saw the door handle moving, being turned from within. The private secretary melted into the shadows to observe who was leaving the room at such an early hour. He almost expected to see the Doctor exit the bedchamber, as that would explain the curious relationship between these two travelling companions. Instead it was James Lees who slipped silently out before furtively creeping away.

Sir Henry almost stepped out of the shadows to confront Lees, but stopped himself. Better to keep this information for future use. Plainly there was more to the relationship between these strangers than was apparent. The Queen might trust these people implicitly, but Ponsonby could not.

His job was to protect her, often from her own worst instincts.

He would watch and wait. When the time was right, only then would he strike back...

Nyssa was gently shaken awake by the Doctor, his face etched with worry in the pale light of morning. 'What it is -

what's wrong?' Nyssa asked.

He pointed to the empty space beside her on the bed.

James was gone.

'Where is he?'

'I don't know,' the Doctor admitted. 'I went in search of fresh writing paper about an hour ago. When I returned he I Ltd disappeared. But I

think I know where he's headed.'

'Back to the portal?'

'I suspect so. The Doctor began pacing up and down the bedchamber, his hands clasped behind his back. 'I should I have anticipated this would happen, but I thought he would need more time to recover from last night's episode.

Nyssa sat up, realising she had fallen asleep in her clothes. 'Should we have Sir Henry or the general institute a search for James?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'We know where he's headed.

We must ensure we reach the portal before he does.

Fortunately for us, James has no money, nor any obvious means of transport. It's almost ironic - I had planned to visit the site anyway, taking James with us. His departure just makes that journey more urgent.'

Nyssa looked at the notes and calculations the Doctor had scribbled during the night. 'Did you find something among the data I recorded?'

'Yes. Come here and I'll show you.' The Doctor went to the table at the end of Nyssa's bed, where he had laid out his workings. 'This top row shows James's condition during the hypnotic regression.'

Nyssa studied the results carefully. They had remained normal for much of the session but accelerated far beyond normal tolerance levels in the final minutes. 'Doctor, there is no earthly way James should still be alive. The strain that episode placed on his body ought to have killed him outright'

'Precisely Now study the second row. These results are from the other equipment. They monitored ambient changes within this room during the session'

Nyssa pored over these, comparing them to the entries in her journal. There - a surge in artron energy! I knew there had been an unusual reading. But I thought artron energy was used to power the TARDIS. Why should it have been present here last night? Unless... When you regressed James backwards through his memories, might they have invoked a similar effect as the TARDIS does at the moment of dematerialisation?'

`That's what I've been wondering myself,' the Doctor replied. Time Lords possess a quantum of artron energy as part of their genetic make-up. This increases in tiny increments with each journey through time they undertake.

Since I time-travel so frequently, I have an unusually high level. It's like a benign form of radiation, like getting a suntan'

`But prolonged exposure to any form of radiation can cause problems...'

'Yes, eventually. When a Time Lord regenerates, the accumulation is reduced back to its base level' The Doctor pointed at the final row of notes, this one made up entirely of his own calculations. 'Now, look at these numbers. The first set of figures shows my levels of artron energy at the last reading before all the monitors exploded'

On Traken Nyssa had been among the brightest and most inquisitive minds of her generation, thanks to her father's promptings. She studied the Doctor's writings carefully, nodding as she concurred with his calculations. 'The levels are high but not dangerously so' Her eyes slid sideways to the accompanying set of numbers. 'But this second set of calculations - they are greater by a magnitude of more than a thousand-fold. Whose are...?' Her voice trailed off. `James?'

The Doctor nodded. 'I needed you to cross-check my figures. James has a thousand times the safe level of artron energy in his body - if he were a Time Lord. For a human being... he should be dead already.'

Nyssa's eyes widened a little as realisation struck her. The second source of artron energy - it wasn't coming from James. It was coming from the apparition, the ghost!

'Of course!' The Doctor clapped a hand to his forehead.

'Well done, Nyssa! That explains the physiological readings too. When James goes into one of his trances, it is actually the apparition that speaks with the voices of the dead. James must just be its host.'

`So James is linked to that weakness in the space-time continuum,' she said. 'He isn't the cause of it, but he is a symptom. That's why the TARDIS brought here'

Exactly. Whatever else happens, we must stop James from re-entering that portal. The results could be cataclysmic'

The Doctor began packing away all his notes and equipment into the box from the TARDIS will make my report to the Queen at noon. She can order the army contingent already on guard around the portal to prevent anyone from entering or interacting with it. Fortunately, with the river valley flooded, the opening should be beyond the reach of most equipment available in this era'

`Doctor, there's something I have to ask you. Last night, when the apparition first appeared - how did you know to say I should imagine it was my father?'

The Doctor stopped his packing. 'Yes, I was wondering when you were going to question that' He looked at Nyssa and then sat in a chair. 'It was a hunch'

À hunch?'

À guess. An educated one, born of experience and knowledge, but still a guess'

`That's not what I was asking. How did you know I would be safe if I imagined the ghost was that of my father? What was that thing last night?'

When Vollmer, Johnson and Hawthorne reached the railway station on the outskirts of Lanark, there was a telegram, two heavy wooden crates and a Royal Navy officer waiting for them. Immaculate in his naval uniform, he appeared less than impressed with his first sighting of the three soldiers.

`Not much of a welcoming committee!' he said. 'Who's in charge?'

The sergeant stepped forward, feeling his hackles already starting to rise. 'If you mean of us three, I am. If you mean of the contingent, that's Lieutenant Reginald Ashe. Who the hell are you?'

`Lieutenant Peter Kempshall. Judging by the expression on your face, I'd say you weren't expecting me.' The new arrival pointed at the two crates. 'We'll need more than just you three to shift this lot'

`Thank you for that insight, sir,' Vollmer replied.

`Lieutenant Ashe had already directed us to obtain a horse and cart for that purpose'

`Jolly good,' Kempshall said cheerfully.

A small, apologetic man approached, doffing his black peaked cap and clutching an envelope. 'Excuse me, but there's a telegram here for the soldiers camped above Corra Linn. Arrived yesterday from Windsor but I haven't had a chance to forward it on'

The sergeant grabbed the envelope and ripped it open to read the contents. 'REQUEST LATEST REGARDING

CORRA LINN ENCAMPMENT STOP SEND DESPATCH

SOONEST STOP GENERAL GORDON DOULTON,

WINDSOR CASTLE. Vollmer was furious at the delay in receiving it and gave the stationmaster an earful. After that the browbeaten man was eager to loan his horse and cart to the soldiers without charge. Vollmer bullied the meek man into helping them load the crates on to the cart. The sergeant then dictated a return telegram to the general, informing him the contingent had made camp.

The large wooden boxes filled the back of the cart, leaving no room for passengers. The lieutenant stowed his kit bag between the crates and took one of the places on the front of the cart. 'So, how far is it to Corra Linn?' he asked.

The Doctor leaned forward in the tall chair, elbows resting on the polished wooden arms, his fingers forming a steeple shape in front of his face. 'I believe there is a creature hiding inside James. It seems able to reach into people's minds and find the one thing about which they feel the strongest emotions. Usually, those feelings are memories associated with grief and loss. Last night, when that apparition was approaching you, I realised your strongest emotion was fear.

I was trying to help you overcome that fear and remember your father, so the spirit would take on his form instead'

'What about Adric? He died far more recently than my father - why not tell me to think of Adric? Or Tegan?'

The Doctor sighed heavily. 'Nyssa, you're missing the point. Last night was last night. There is something far more important we have to face'

Nyssa leaned against the end of the wrought-iron bed frame, her face betraying her uncertainty. 'I don't understand what you're talking about, Doctor.'

Rather than look at her, he concentrated on studying his fingers.

`Nyssa, the death of a parent, that's a terrible thing for anyone to face. But to have that parent murdered and then see their body possessed by the killer... that's almost beyond imagining.

Ì think I've coped with it quite well.'

`Have you ever heard of post-traumatic stress disorder?

It's a psychological condition that will be identified on Earth within the next hundred years. In essence, people who suffer a traumatic experience and are unable to cope with it can become anxious, prone to physical illness or increasingly withdrawn. If not treated, this can affect them for the rest of their lives. In some cases they become suicidal, hurting themselves and others'

Ì'm not from Earth'

`No, but you've been displaying many classic symptoms of the disorder. You've been having dizzy spells...'

`You said that was a mild mental disorientation, nothing more'

Ì thought it was at the time. Then I saw how you reacted to Adric's sudden death. Tegan was grief-stricken, shouting and screaming that I should use the TARDIS to rescue Adric from the freighter. But you hardly showed any emotion at all'

Ì was comforting Tegan, she needed me to be strong -'

`Comforting her - or trying to feel something yourself?'

Nyssa was starting to lose patience with the Doctor. `Look, just because I don't break down in tears whenever something goes wrong

Adric was dead, Nyssa. You saw him killed, yet you hardly reacted'

Ì'm sorry if my failure to share every emotion I feel with everyone at every moment fails to meet with your approval, Doctor! Not everyone can be like Tegan or Adric!' She turned away, refusing to look at him any more.

`Withdrawal - another classic symptom. With every successive loss you pull yourself inwards a little more, determined not to let anything hurt you again. You're trying to build walls around your feelings to protect them, when all you're doing is entombing those emotions' The Doctor let his hands drop into his lap. 'Do you know what the worst

aspect of all this was? It was only when I glanced inside your journal that I began to see what was wrong'

Nyssa was furious. 'How dare you read my private thoughts and observations!'

It fell open when you fainted in the Mausoleum. I only read a few lines, just enough to confirm it was yours. But those words crystallised my suspicions. "Traken is as dead to me now as my father. With Adric dead and Tegan gone, I have never been more alone." Aren't those your words?'

Nyssa's hands were shaking and she couldn't seem to stop them. I can't believe you invaded my privacy like that!

How you got no respect for my feelings, Doctor? How could you be so callous?'

I don't enjoy doing this, Nyssa, but it has to be faced before we can continue travelling together.' The Doctor took a deep breath. 'I know a little of the Traken rituals of death, how your people regarded the interdependence of the body and the soul. You believe Tremas will never rest easy while the Master uses your father's body as his own'

'You don't know what you're talking about, Doctor.'

In a way you feel responsible for your father's death -

perhaps you could have saved him if you had done something differently. You probably think about revenge against the Master, despite such a concept being contrary to your beliefs. Perhaps you even wish you had died instead of your father, rather than be left behind to carry on without him'

'Stop talking to me this way - please!'

The Doctor stood and slowly moved towards Nyssa. 'But most of all, I think you probably blame me for what happened. You believe I could have saved your father's life.

You think if I had stayed on just a few more hours to ensure the Master had perished, your father might be alive today -

along with the rest of Traken. Along with everything you ever loved and held dear. Isn't that right, Nyssa? Isn't that what you really think? Isn't that the truth?'

'Shut up!' Nyssa turned and shouted at the Doctor. 'Shut up! Please, just stop talking! Please!' She threw herself at him, fists and arms flailing, wanting so much to hurt him.

'Please, Doctor - please...' Then she was crying, great sobs shaking her to the core, tears streaming down her face.

He folded himself around her and let her cling to him, safe in his embrace. That's it, Nyssa, let it out - just let it all out.

Don't be afraid to cry. We all have to grieve...'

'I say, it's dashed close here, isn't it?' Lieutenant Ashe mopped a few beads of perspiration from his brow with a cotton handkerchief. He stood on the edge of the riverbank, watching as his men sweated and strained to lower a wooden pontoon over the water. They had spent the morning constructing the jetty while Ashe offered ineffectual advice.

He had been raised to become an officer and a gentleman, not some labourer's navvy, so he felt little embarrassment at being unable to help further. His role was to lead and inspire the men - not join in. Officers in the engineering corps may feel like playing at mud pies but Ashe preferred to keep his hands clean.

Heavy posts had been driven into the sides of the riverbank. Now the platform was being floated into position beside them, thick ropes used to secure it to the posts.

Several of the men jumped into the water to hold the platform in place, as it threatened to float away downstream. 'Take a care, men!' Ashe called. 'We don't want that pontoon going over the top of the dam, do we? The natives wouldn't be too chuffed with us then!'

Once the platform was lashed into position, one of the enlisted men approached the lieutenant with a request. 'It's been hard work getting that jetty in place, sir,' Lance Corporal Clark explained. 'Some of the lads were wondering if you'd give them permission to take a dip in the river. Do us all a world of good.'

Ashe reluctantly agreed. Half the men were already in the water anyway and the rest were soaked through with perspiration. Perhaps there was some sense in what Clark was suggesting. 'All right, but we are here to stand guard over this site until we receive further orders - not to turn it into a public baths. Is that clear?' Clark responded with a salute before hurrying away to give the good news to the others.

The lieutenant quite fancied taking to the water himself, but felt it wouldn't be good form in front of the men. Perhaps he could slip down this evening. Ashe looked up into the sky as a lone bird of prey wheeled overhead. The sun was directly above them now. He imagined Vollmer and the volunteers must be on their way back. When the equipment arrived, he would have to open his sealed orders. But until then, he was happy to enjoy the surroundings. The lieutenant decided to walk upstream, to see what lay above Corra Linn.

The Doctor and Nyssa had spent the morning talking. Upon reflection, Nyssa realised she had done most of the talking, pouring out her feelings and fears. All too much of what the Doctor had been saying about her was true. She still wasn't sure she accepted his diagnosis, but she couldn't deny the feelings of alienation that had been haunting her. Tegan had been her friend, but the Australian woman had needed Nyssa more than Nyssa had needed her - or so it had seemed at the time. Now she could see a fresh perspective on events.

Nyssa realised her problems wouldn't just disappear, but she had made a start on addressing them. The Doctor had invoked an old Earth adage as a comfort. 'A problem shared is a problem halved.'

Sir Henry found them laughing when he arrived to summon them before the Queen. 'Her Majesty is ready to hear your report on the veracity or otherwise of the claims made by James Lees,' the private secretary announced stiffly.

The Doctor indicated he was ready. 'I should like my travelling companion to attend the meeting. She will be able to confirm the truth of what I will tell her royal highness'

'As you wish' Ponsonby led them along the corridors of the castle before bidding them to wait in the antechamber to the Queen's private office. 'I shall see if she is ready for you'

He slipped through the double doors, leaving them alone for a minute.

'Doctor, how much will you tell Queen Victoria?' Nyssa asked.

'As much as she can understand. If I start discussing artron energy and the space-time continuum she will think me either a fool or a madman - neither of which furthers our efforts here. Better simply to omit a few key facts so that -'

The doors swung open and Sir Henry beckoned the Doctor and Nyssa

inside. The Queen was waiting for them, sitting behind her desk. Flanking her was General Doulton, a large rolled document visible in the crook of his arm. Victoria welcomed her guests and asked them to stand in front of the desk. 'We have asked our ladies-in-waiting and household staff to withdraw,' she explained. 'Some things are better discussed in private. But where is Master Lees? We expected him to be present here.'

'We have been unable to locate him, Your Majesty,' Sir Henry replied, his face betraying nothing further.

'This is most irregular. Have you had the grounds searched?' the Queen demanded.

'I doubt such a search would discover him, Your Majesty,'

the Doctor said. 'I believe James has departed Windsor and is trying to make his way north.'

'Toward what purpose?'

'I believe he is returning to Corra Linn, the place where he gained his unusual abilities, ma'am. James told me he has made many attempts to return there in the past. He hopes to find the answer there to what troubles him.'

'This is most vexing,' the Queen said sternly. 'We put Master Lees into your care, Doctor, we made him your responsibility.'

'Indeed, ma'am. I can only apologise for this lapse. If it is any consolation, I had already ascertained from him all the particulars of how he first acquired his unique gift. I believe at least some of the claims he made to you were genuine.'

James does speak with the voices of the deceased, of that there can be no doubt. Last night he manifested the spirit of my companion's dead father, a remarkable display of psychic phenomena the likes of which I have never witnessed before'

Victoria turned to Nyssa, her eyes glinting intently. 'You saw your father, Lady Nyssa? What did he say to you?'

'He told me not to cry at his passing, Your Majesty,' she replied. 'He said we would meet again on the Other Side -

and he embraced me'

The Queen took in a sharp breath. 'You felt his physical presence?'

Nyssa nodded. 'It was as if he were there in the room with me, as though he had never died. For a few brief moments, we were reunited'

The Queen was visibly battling to contain her emotions. 'If only we could be afforded the same opportunity with our beloved husband,' she said eventually. 'We might be better able to bear his loss' Her fingers bunched tightly around a white linen handkerchief, ragged nails scratching against the lace edging. A long, awkward silence followed while the Queen got her feelings under control again. 'Well, what must be done?' she asked.

The Doctor was first to respond. 'Your Majesty, I understand a contingent of men is already at Corra Linn...'

'That is correct. General Doulton has all the particulars, so he can brief us further.' She summoned the military man forward with a glance. He pulled the document from under his arm and, with Victoria's permission, unrolled it across her desk. The heavy parchment was a topographical map of the area surrounding the Falls of Clyde. At the Queen's behest Doulton offered a brief history of settlement around the falls.

'For most of its length the River Clyde is a waterway of gentle pace. However, in a valley south of Lanark it becomes a torrent of water while flowing through a narrow gorge. The river passes over a series of falls, the tallest being Corra Linn,' the general said, pointing to its location on the map. 'In 1785 a cotton-spinning community called New Lanark was established a mile downstream from the last of the falls, using water from the river to power its mills. Less than ten years ago plans were made to dam the river between New Lanark and Corra Linn, flooding part of the valley so the water could be used to generate something called hydropower. This map shows the valley before it was flooded. Once the dam was completed, the valley was flooded back up to Corra Linn. The project was beset by problems and further work was abandoned. There was some fanciful talk of a curse, Your Majesty.'

'There is nothing fanciful about it,' the Doctor interjected. 'I

believe James discovered something real and dangerous just below Corra Linn, Your Majesty. A rift, if you will, between worlds. He was drawn into that rift. When he emerged, James had been changed by his experience. He became one of the most powerful mediums ever

known'

Ponsonby was unable to stifle a snort of derision. The Queen glared at her private secretary 'Did you have something to add, Sir Henry?'

'Excuse me, Your Majesty, but I find all of this rather difficult to accept'

'Are you doubting the word of your Queen?' Victoria demanded. 'We were present in the Mausoleum, we heard the voice of our beloved husband speak to us from beyond this life! Are you calling us a liar, Sir Henry?'

'No, Your Majesty, of course not. I was merely saying that I... that I...'
Sir Henry quailed before her stare, words faltering in his mouth.
'Forgive me, ma'am'

'Since you have nothing useful to add to this discussion, we suggest you remain silent henceforth!' Having put Ponsonby in his place, the Queen turned back to the Doctor.

'This rift of which you speak - could it be a doorway to the Other Side, to the afterlife? That would explain how James is able to communicate with our dearly departed'

'It would be one explanation, Your Majesty, the Doctor conceded.

'Good. Then our decision was correct'

'What decision was this, Your Majesty?'

'Several years ago we attended an exposition of new inventions and innovations organised by the Royal Society.

Our beloved husband was an enthusiastic proponent of such endeavours, believing them a mark of the Empire's greatness. There I saw a device that enabled a man to walk underwater without having to return to the surface to breathe

- a diving suit, I believe it was called. A wheel is turned above the water that pumps air down to the suit through a hose, enabling the man inside the suit to breathe freely.'

'Oh no,' the Doctor whispered.

'When we first heard about this portal being underwater, we remembered the diving suit. The Royal Navy even has a diving school.

We sent word to the school asking that one of these diving suits be sent to the contingent, along with an experienced underwater explorer. Both of these should have arrived at Corra Linn by today. Once the soldiers have been instructed how to operate the pump, the explorer will go down to investigate this gateway further. Alas, Master Lees cannot be our envoy to the afterlife as our beloved husband wanted.

But we shall send an envoy, nevertheless'

'Your Majesty, I must beg you to send word to this contingent,' the Doctor said, his voice full of urgency. 'The soldiers must not attempt to enter the gateway. Even to approach the rift is most dangerous. We cannot be certain what will be encountered on the other side, if someone should pass through it'

'But we already know the answer, Doctor,' the Queen replied. 'It is the afterlife, the Other Side of death. How else could visiting that place give Master Lees his rare gift? How else could it place him in communion with those who have already passed over?'

'Forgive me, ma'am,' the Doctor said, 'but are there not other worlds beyond this life? Not all those who die are granted eternal peace and happiness'

Her face paled. 'You mean...'

'Your Majesty would not wish to send someone through this rift to face Purgatory - or worse. Better that the men of your contingent watch and wait'

'We are not used to being contradicted, Doctor. What do you propose we do?'

'My travelling companion and I will journey north to this site. There we can undertake a full and thorough investigation of the phenomenon. Only once I am satisfied about where this rift does lead would I be happy about you allowing anyone to enter it'

The Queen contemplated this quietly. 'What you say makes sense, Doctor. We shall have our private secretary send the telegram you request. In the meantime, there is something we wish to give you' Victoria opened a drawer and pulled out a sheet of black-bordered writing paper. Dipping the nib of her pen repeatedly into a pot of black ink, she scrawled a few words across the page and carefully blotted them dry. Satisfied with her handiwork, she passed the

document to the Doctor. 'There, that will ensure you are given the fullest co-operation as you carry out this mission on our behalf. God speed to you both'

`Thank you, ma'am' The Doctor took the paper from her grasp and bowed graciously, Nyssa following his lead with a curtsy. They retreated to the antechamber.

Nyssa was eager to know what the Queen had written.

`Well, Doctor - what is it?' she asked while he read the brief note.

It seems that Queen Victoria has just appointed me as her Scientific Advisor.'

`Your Majesty I must object in the strongest of terms!' Doulton thundered. 'You cannot send two strangers of whom we know very little to lead a contingent of your troops. By all means have them conduct this investigation, but let it be under military supervision.'

The Queen raised an eyebrow at the general. 'We recall it was you, General, who first introduced the Doctor and Lady Nyssa to us'

`That is true, ma'am, and I have had no objection to their presence. But civilians cannot be given control of Her Majesty's armed forces!'

`What do you suggest?'

`Let me accompany them. I will provide the necessary guidance and ensure your troops are properly deployed'

`Very well. We have no further use for you here at Windsor anyway.'

Doulton smiled through this slight. 'There is something further, Your Majesty. If this gateway does prove to be a portal to the afterlife, I would like your permission to lead an expeditionary force through it. What greater glory could there be than to lay claim to that blessed land as a colony of your mighty British Empire?'

The Queen smiled at this notion. 'So be it. Draw upon whatever men and resources you judge to be necessary, general. But take a care before you act too precipitously'

Doulton bowed deeply before her. 'If you will excuse me, ma'am, I must away to make preparation for our journey into the north' Given leave to go by a slight nod of the Queen's head, the general strode to

the door and made his exit.

Sir Henry Ponsonby conspicuously cleared his throat.

'Yes? Are you still here?' Victoria asked but got no words in return. With a heavy sigh she granted her private secretary permission to speak once more.

'Your Majesty, I would ask you permission to contact Scotland Yard. It would be best if the authorities were informed of the Doctor's whereabouts.'

'Yes, yes, of course. Now leave us. We have much to think on.'

Sir Henry nodded and withdrew. He was proud to be the Queen's private secretary but he had no intention of sending telegrams to Corra Linn on behalf of this Doctor - certainly not before he was satisfied that Scotland Yard knew of this upstart.

It was Hawthorne who found Ashe. The two privates had completed the arduous journey back from Lanark with Vollmer, Lieutenant Kempshall and the new equipment. But when the horse and cart could not cover the final mile because the trail ahead was so uneven, it was Kempshall who decided he should go on to fetch help. That left Vollmer, Johnson and Hawthorne to begin carrying one of the crates up and along the wooded hillside. The box was fiendishly heavy, driving splinters from the roughly hewn wood into their hands and arms. The trio had made little progress when a dozen of their fellow soldiers appeared. The combined efforts of all the men made the task much easier and the crates were safely delivered to the encampment before nightfall.

They arrived to find Kempshall examining the pontoon, but no sign of Ashe. 'What do you mean, he's missing - where is he?' Vollmer demanded.

'We don't know, Sergeant,' Lance Corporal Clark admitted.

He was a heavy lad with flaming red hair and broad shoulders. Despite having only been in the unit a few months, he was one of the few willing to stand up to the sergeant's gruff manner. 'Once we finished lashing the pontoon into position, the lieutenant gave us permission to have a swim in the water to cool off. Last time any of us saw him was about half an hour later. He was up on that rock over there, having a look across the water to the other bank' Clark indicated a vantage point just upstream from Corra Linn.

Vollmer tutted to himself. 'It'll be getting dark soon and nobody wants to be out in the open here at night. I want you to split into teams of two and begin searching the surrounding area. Five pairs go upstream, five pairs search the hills and the rest of you try downstream. Do not lose sight of your partner. If you haven't found anything before the sun touches the hills, start heading back. If you do find the lieutenant, fire a single shot into the air and wait. Fire another shot once every minute until I reach you. Is that clear?' The soldiers gave a murmur in response. 'Now get going. I will stay here in case Ashe returns to camp. Move!'

The men broke ranks and set off, stopping only to collect their rifles and ammunition. Hawthorne found himself working with Johnson again. 'You're like a bad penny, did you know that?'

'Speak for yourself, Thorny,' the younger man replied. Ì

saw enough of your ugly face dragging those crates back to camp. What do you think is inside them?'

'Don't know and I don't care' Hawthorne stopped and peered into the forest around them. 'Can you see anyone else?'

'No'

'Me neither. Time for a smoke' Hawthorne pulled his tobacco tin out of a pocket and perched on the stump of a fallen tree to fill his pipe.

'Thorny! What about looking for the lieutenant?'

'What about it? Stupid bugger's big enough and ugly enough to look after himself. If he isn't, he shouldn't be in the army.' Satisfied with the arrangement of tobacco he had nurtured into the bowl of his pipe, Hawthorne slipped his tin back into a pocket. 'You got a match?'

Johnson shook his head. 'How many times do I have to tell you? I don't smoke'

'Doesn't mean you aren't carrying matches' Hawthorne patted all his pockets but already knew he had left his own back at camp. 'Stands to reason, just common courtesy. You should carry matches, then if someone asks you for a light, you've got one to give'

'You're the one that smokes! Why don't you have your matches?'

'Bloody Vollmer sent us out here before I could pick them up, didn't

he?' Hawthorne sighed and dug out the tobacco tin again, tipping the contents of his pipe back into the rectangular container.

'He's not that bad, you know.' Johnson said.

'Who?'

'The sergeant. Could have had us up on report last night, but he didn't'

Only because he knew he needed two willing volunteers for today - us' Hawthorne stood up and eased open the buttons on his trousers. 'Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to pass water.' He stepped carefully over the fallen tree trunk and began relieving himself, whistling tunelessly. Hawthorne was just getting everything back in its proper place when his eyes wandered sideways across the ground. 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph!'

Johnson rushed over to his side. 'Thorny! What is it? You didn't half make me -'

'Pass me your rifle, Nicholas. The sergeant will want to see this' Hawthorne fired a single shot into the air and handed the weapon back to Johnson. Then he undid the buttons of his tunic and took it off before carefully laying the garment over Lieutenant Ashe's face. 'Don't know what did that to him, but it looks like he's been scared to death.'

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: It was dark when we reached London, having travelled in from Windsor by train. General Doulton put the Doctor and me into a hansom cab and directed the driver to the Great Northern Hotel at King's Cross. 'I'll meet you outside the station at eight sharp tomorrow morning,' he shouted as the cab pulled away.

'Where will you be?' the Doctor called back.

'At my club,' Doulton replied before disappearing into the night. 'I'll just make sure your box of equipment is safely gored at the station overnight!'

The Doctor settled back into the cab and sighed. 'Now this is the life. A much more civilised way to travel. You know something, I can't remember the last time I rode in a hansom cab. 1892, perhaps...'

I was looking out of the window, fascinated by how different London was from my other visit to his city. The clothes, the buildings, even the transportation in which we were sitting were much at variance

with my previous experiences. I asked the Doctor how long it would take us to reach our destination.

'King's Cross? Less than an hour I should think - it's long past rush hour. The Doctor smiled broadly at his own joke.

'No, I mean to reach the rift,' I replied, not appreciating the jest.

Àhh, well, now you're asking. Without a copy of Bradshaw's I can't honestly tell you. The Great Northern Railway from King's Cross does run trains to Scotland, but it will hardly be an express service. And as for a buffet of light refreshments...'

I asked him to approximate - days, weeks or months?

'Hopefully no more than a day. I suspect the longest part of the journey may be getting to the rift itself once we've arrived in Scotland'

I still couldn't understand why we simply didn't use the TARDIS to make the trip.

'Not the most inconspicuous form of transport we could choose,' the Doctor replied. 'Besides, the old girl is not at her best doing short hops sideways in space. This way both the TARDIS and we are guaranteed to get there, even if it takes a little longer. Now enjoy the ride. It's not often we have the luxury of savouring our circumstances'

It was nearly midnight when Sergeant Vollmer began sorting through and cataloguing all of Ashe's personal effects.

Kempshall had taken one look at the corpse and turned a queasy shade of green, but that didn't stop the naval lieutenant commandeering the dead man's tent for himself.

So Vollmer was forced to finish this unhappy task outside in the cold night air. The weak light from his lantern illuminated the meagre possessions - a shaving brush made of badger's bristles, a leather strop and cut-throat razor, some sterling silver cufflinks, a sepia photograph of an elderly, stern-faced couple - presumably Ashe's parents. At least I won't have to write and tell them their son is dead, Vollmer thought. Ashe had been his commanding officer, so that unhappy task would fall to someone further up the chain of command.

Thank goodness for small mercies.

Vollmer was still trying to push away the image of those lifeless,

staring eyes. The lieutenant's lips had been drawn back from his gums as if he was about to scream, but no sound would come from that mouth again. Most curious of all, Ashe's hair had turned completely white, as if he had aged decades in moments. The rest of his face showed no such signs, but the hair colour - how would the examining surgeon explain that to the grieving family? The body had been carefully wrapped in linen cloth and sealed inside a long canvas bag. In the morning Vollmer would send to the nearest undertaker for a coffin to collect the dead man and transport the corpse back to Aldershot for a full military funeral.

The sergeant found the orders folded inside Ashe's copy of the King James Bible, a single sheet of paper folded over three times and sealed with red wax. Scrawled across the outside of the paper were three words. 'Open Upon Arrival.

Vollmer decided now was as good a time as any. Should the contents prove him wrong, he could always blame the mistake on Ashe. He didn't think the dead lieutenant would begrudge him that.

The razor quickly dealt with the seal and Vollmer opened out the folded sheet of paper. Its interior edges had a thick border of black ink. The sergeant need a few moments to decipher the handwriting but the signature was quite clear.

Vollmer rested his hands against his knees to stop the paper shaking and began to read.

Windsor

Feb 1863

To the Officer who receives these Orders: You have been chosen for a most important mission on behalf of your Queen. You and your men have two tasks we wish you to perform. In the water beneath Corra Linn is said to be a portal, a secret entranceway to another world. Your first task is to stand guard and make sure no others may gain access to that place. We trust this part of your mission has already been communicated to you, along with an order to construct a platform out over the water's edge from the northern bank of the River Clyde.

Your second task is much more dangerous and important.

If certain information before us is proven, you will soon take delivery of two crates. These contain a diving suit and the mechanism by which air

can be pumped into the suit, enabling a man to walk under water. Your contingent will be joined by an expert from the Royal Navy's diving school. Your men shall help this brave soul venture down to find the portal.

It should resemble a glowing white light, deep beneath the surface of the water. Once it has been located and thoroughly examined, you shall communicate any and all findings to us as a matter of urgency.

Finally, we cannot stress enough the need for utter secrecy and discretion in this. Pass no word of what is being undertaken to any third party unless they carry our personal authorisation. If word should escape about your mission, it could engender panic and unrest of titanic proportions. We trust you shall do your duty by your country and your Queen.

May God go with you in all your efforts.

The sealed orders were concluded with the signature of the Queen, her royal crest beside it. When Vollmer had finished reading the letter, he folded it back together and stared at the single sheet of paper for several minutes.

'Blimey,' he whispered to no one in particular. Vollmer contemplated waking Kempshall to show him the orders but decided it could wait until the morning. The sergeant was struggling to keep his eyes open. Right now what he needed more than anything was sleep. Vollmer finished packing away Ashe's effects into a box for transportation with the body, then retired to his own tent. There he penned a letter of his own before finally going to bed. He hoped not to be visited by any dreams in the night, lest they feature the lifeless eyes of Lieutenant Ashe.

Chapter Four

February 17, 1863

Very well, my child, you may see what you wish, but we cannot say how long this window on worlds will remain open.

The surroundings begin to shimmer, a hole appearing in reality, widening in the air. You look deeply into it, eyes searching for a sign, a vision, some evidence. A familiar face is there, smiling yet full of concern. You know the voice, its friendly tones. Others are shouting, warnings and threats.

You try to call out but there is a crack of thunder,' a scream and everything turns red, blood red and -

Nyssa opened her eyes. It was a dream, another dream - but this time it was her own. No, not a dream. More like a vision, a glimpse of the future perhaps, or of some forgotten yesterday. Yes, that was it, a premonition, the shape of things yet to happen. But what did it mean? Always questions without answers. Travelling with the Doctor could be a very frustrating experience, she decided. She sat up, wondering what time it was.

Outside the voices of street vendors cut through the air, distinctive London accents running words together. Nyssa got out of her narrow single bed and went to the window of the hotel room. It was cramped accommodation compared to the luxury and splendour of Windsor, but that was only to be expected. She pushed aside the curtains and looked down upon the cobbled streets of King's Cross. Horse-drawn carts, carriages and cabs rattled past, gentlemen and ladies taking the early morning air, a paper seller waving his wares above his head. Two grubby-faced children were playing in the street, chasing each other between the carriages and carts.

Another was standing happily in a still-steaming pile of horse droppings, faeces warming the child's bare feet in the February cold. A few white flakes drifted past the window, but the snow was not settling yet.

Nyssa scrubbed her face with cold water. Once her ablutions were finished she fought her way into the garment Mary had given her, a simpler dress without an awkward crinoline to hamper her movements. Nyssa had no wish to spend a day on a train while trapped inside a metal cage, even if young ladies of this era considered such an encumbrance to be fashionable. After ensuring she still had her journal, Nyssa ventured downstairs to find the Doctor in the dining room examining his breakfast. He held up a limp, sickly slice of fish, his face betraying every iota of his disappointment. 'I enjoyed the kippers at the castle so much I decided to order them here and see how they compared'

'And?'

'I suggest you try the porridge instead'

'Porridge?'

À dish made from oatmeal or another cereal, cooked in water or milk

to a thick consistency. Very nourishing. Some prefer it with sugar but porridge is best with a sprinkling of salt, I find. In parts of Scotland they pour the finished mixture into a drawer. Whenever somebody is hungry, they just open the drawer and cut themselves a slice to eat'

Nyssa peered at him across the breakfast table. 'Is that true?'

'You know something, I'm not sure it is. The Brigadier might have been pulling my leg about that.'

'The Brigadier?'

'You must meet him some time. Splendid chap' The Doctor abandoned his kipper and went back to reading *The Times*.

1863 - I wonder if England are on tour? Can't seem to find a match report'

'Perhaps if you put on your glasses?' Nyssa suggested.

'Good point' The Doctor patted his pockets without success. 'Must have left them in the TARDIS. Remind me to pick them up en route. During the journey I want to check the TARDIS instruments, see if there's been any change to the weakness in the space-time continuum. With any luck that message will reach Corra Linn before the soldiers attempt to enter the portal'

'And if it doesn't?'

'Then I shudder to think of the consequences. Now drink your tea. We have to meet General Doulton outside the station in thirty minutes'

Vollmer was determined to get an early start on the day, having failed to get much rest during the night. He had shifted uncomfortably in his sleep for hours, trying to push aside the nagging doubts that troubled him. What had Ashe seen that could frighten a man to death? What did the Queen expect them to find beyond this portal she described? The sergeant found it difficult to escape a feeling of creeping dread, as if he might never see his Clara again. They had grown up on the same street in Whitechapel but she had ignored him throughout their childhood years. It was only when he came home from the army for his first leave, the grubby young boy replaced by a dashing young man in uniform, that she acknowledged his attentions.

They had courted for five months, awkward afternoons sitting in a drawing room under the watchful gaze of her parents, conversations

progressing no faster than the hour hand on a clock. Only as Vollmer was leaving and arriving did he get the chance to kiss her, polite pecks on the cheek gradually developing into passionate embraces. Clara was determined to keep her virtue until the wedding night and Charlie - she always called him Charlie, a name he let no one else use - had respected that. The honeymoon had been a disaster, two bleak nights in a Brighton boarding house, the landlady peering around every corner at them. Then it was back to the army for him and back to her parents for Clara, waiting until the day they could save enough to get a room of their own.

She wanted a baby so much, it almost broke his heart.

They tried and tried but nothing came of it. Once she had been with child but the infant was lost after three months, a terrible night. After that she grew colder, unresponsive to his touch. If they couldn't have children, there was no need for him to expect any of that, she had said. So he had volunteered for longer postings away from home and their marital bed had grown ever colder. If only they'd been able to have a child, things might have been different - but it wasn't to be. So Charlie had concentrated on the army instead, rising through the ranks to become Sergeant Vollmer. The young men in his charge had become his boys, in a way, the sons he would never have. But away from home he missed Clara so much. Sleep never came easy without her. That made him grumpy and irascible during the day, something he directed against the laziest of his troops. It kept them on their toes.

Vollmer quickly washed, dressed and marched down to the water's edge. The crates had been left there the previous evening during the search for Ashe. With the lieutenant dead, it was up to Vollmer to ensure the mission met its challenge.

He used the tip of a bayonet to crack open the lids of both crates. Inside the first was an upright box of burnished wood and metal, a heavy wheel mounted on either side of it. Two round gauges were set into the wood. From near the base of the box a pair of thick, hollow pipes protruded.

The second crate contained what Vollmer deduced must be the diving suit. It was like a pair of bulky rubber long johns.

The suit had ties at its wrists and ankles, but round the neck was a metal and leather collar with fixed screws protruding upwards. Beside it lay a helmet of brass that would encase the entire head of whoever wore it. At the back of the helmet was an opening into which the hose

nozzle could be screwed. At the front of the helmet was another circle of glass, screws and bolts holding it in place to seal off the interior. Vollmer picked up the helmet - god, was it heavy!

Kempshall must be stronger than he looked to bear the weight of this monstrosity. Last but not least was a pair of heavy leather gloves, again with ties at the wrists, and a mighty pair of boots.

`Quite a feat of engineering, isn't it?' The sergeant spun round to find the naval officer approaching. Kempshall was smiling and rubbing his hands together, anticipation in his eyes. He was not wearing most of his uniform, just a vest and trousers over his unlaced boots. 'I had this especially made for me by a clever chap called Augustus Siebe in Denmark Street. Quite the craftsman, let me tell you. All the best fixtures and fittings, not like most of the suits Her Majesty's navy has to use.'

`How can you even move carrying all of that weight?'

Vollmer asked.

It's easy - once you're in the water. But on dry land it's something of a pig.' Kempshall picked up the helmet and blew on the glass porthole at the front, buffing the surface with his palm. 'Look, I wanted to say sorry about yesterday. It had been a hell of a journey up and I probably came across as quite the cad. This all seemed like some jolly adventure until we got back here and found your commanding officer was dead' The lieutenant slipped the helmet under his left arm and offered his right hand.

The sergeant shook it, grateful to make peace. He dug out Ashe's orders and handed them to Kempshall, who read the page before giving a low whistle. `Cripes. Can't say I know what's afoot here, but I'll do my best to help out' The lieutenant began checking over his equipment to ensure it had survived the journey intact. He looked up at Vollmer.

'Look old chap, I think it best if you take charge of your men.

Strictly speaking I outrank you, but I can't see a lot of army lads taking well to orders from a naval officer. What do you think?'

Vollmer agreed, finding himself rapidly revising his opinion of Kempshall. For someone who liked mucking about in boats for a living, the lieutenant was proving to be a man of common sense and sound judgement. The sergeant went off to rouse his men. He had

noticed how short the days were this far north during the dead of winter. The sooner everyone got moving, the quicker they would be in completing their mission. Vollmer had little urge to spend many more nights in this place, curse or no curse.

* * *

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: The train journey north to Scotland proved to be long, monotonous and uncomfortable. I had suggested to the Doctor we take to the TARDIS, which had been loaded into a carriage packed with other boxes and possessions. But the general was keeping a close eye on us, so we had to keep to our compartment for the first part of the journey. I took the opportunity to put a few questions to the Doctor who, for once, had no distractions to occupy him. I started by noting how much talk there had been at Windsor about life after death.

'Yes. The Victorians were fascinated with trying to make contact with those that had died, the notion of spiritualism'

'Why?'

‘If you can make contact with those who have died, that tends to suggest there is some form of life after death. This era is a crossroads in the development of Western civilisation, Nyssa. For the first time science is beginning to seriously challenge previously unquestioned teachings of religion, such as how mankind was created. The evolution theories of Charles Darwin created a storm of controversy, with debates raging about whether man was created by God or merely descended from apes. Once you start to question how humanity was born...'

‘It is only logical to consider what happens after death?’

‘Precisely. Overturn widely held religious beliefs and you create a philosophical vacuum. Such concerns are nothing new, either here on Earth or elsewhere. It is the nature of sentient beings to ponder such things'

I had noticed the Doctor was careful never to contradict the Queen or James when they had talked about the spirit world. 'Why was that?' I asked. 'Has James discovered a doorway to life after death?'

‘It's possible,' the Doctor said, 'but anything is possible. Is it likely? I have my suspicions about that, but I am keeping an open mind - and so should you. The more questions we can ask, the greater the

knowledge we gain'

As always the Doctor was adept in side-stepping any subtle enquiry. I decided to be as bold and blunt as Tegan would in such circumstances. 'Is there life after death?'

He sighed, perhaps realising I would not let this go.

'Thousands of years ago a Greek philosopher and mathematician called Pythagoras helped propagate a doctrine called metempsychosis - in essence, transmigration of the soul. He believed that when a human dies its soul moves on to another home, be it human, animal or even plant. Many religions have a similar belief, better known as reincarnation, in which souls are reborn forever. Others denounce this as blasphemy.'

'But I saw you die and be born again'

'Regeneration is a form of reincarnation, but it is not infinite. Time Lords can only regenerate twelve times. When their last body dies, they die too'

Unless they find a way to cheat death, I thought, but pushed that to one side. 'So what happens to a Time Lord when their final regeneration dies?'

An electrical scan is made of the brain to collect all its knowledge. This is transferred into the Matrix, a digital gestalt that is used to monitor events across time and space, and to predict future events. So they attain a kind of digital immortality'

'But that is just their memories and knowledge. What about their soul?'

The Doctor shrugged. 'I don't know, Nyssa. Nobody does.'

That's why so many species on so many worlds have systems of faith. Religions offer them hope and something I believe in, a moral code by which to live their lives. Does my religion offer all the answers? Does it matter if you Believe in one god or a thousand? I don't know. I don't have '111 the answers, Nyssa. We each have to find our own' He shifted seats to be beside me in our compartment. 'There's a race of people called the Maori who believe that when they die, their spirit leaves behind their mortal body and travels to the northernmost point of their country, a place called Cape Reinga. It's where the Tasman Sea and the Pacific Ocean meet, two mighty bodies of water crashing

against each other. The Maori believe their spirit makes peace with itself and then dives into the water, becoming one with nature. I have to say, I like the sound of that. When the times comes, I hope to find my own Cape Reinga'

I couldn't help giving the Doctor a hug.

It had taken several hours of preparations but Lieutenant Kempshall was ready to make his first descent into the water below Corra Linn. Once the air hose was secured to the back of his helmet, two men began turning the flywheels on the rotary bellows box. The air quickly inflated the arms and legs of the suit and Kempshall staggered to the side of the pontoon, Vollmer leading him towards the water while slowly uncoiling a guide rope tied to the lieutenant's left wrist.

'Remember the signals?' Kempshall shouted to the sergeant.

Vollmer nodded. 'One quick tug on the guide rope means pump the air down to you faster. Two quick tugs means pull you up. Three quick tugs means jump in and get you'

Satisfied, the lieutenant turned towards the water and let himself fall forwards, plunging into the river with a resounding splash. The guide rope and air hose rapidly unwound themselves over the edge of the pontoon as Kempshall tumbled down through the water. 'Keep those fly-wheels turning!' Vollmer commanded. 'The lower he gets, the greater the water pressure around him becomes and the harder you'll have to pump the air!' The sergeant crouched by the edge of the pontoon, looking down into the water. Already he had lost sight of Kempshall. Vollmer wasn't a religious man but he made the sign of the cross anyway, just for luck. You wouldn't get me down there for love nor money, he vowed.

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: After several hours the train stopped to shed and gain passengers, giving the Doctor and me a chance to seek out the TARDIS. The tall blue box was wedged behind a selection of trunks and howling animals in cages. Once inside I went in search of more comfortable clothes, choosing my favourite crimson tunic and trousers. The Doctor was still calibrating the instruments when I reappeared. 'I know, I know, this is hardly typical clothing for a Victorian lady,' I said when the Doctor raised a quizzical eyebrow at my attire. 'But I am not a Victorian lady. If anyone asks, I will simply say this is traditional on Traken'

Adult women on Traken traditionally wear long gowns and dresses,'

he said.

`You and I know that but nobody else does. Since everyone here is too polite to ask where Traken is, they can hardly contradict me about what people wear there. So making any progress?'

`Just about,' he replied. 'I had hoped the TARDIS might be able to locate James from his artron energy signature, but no such luck.'

I suggested the parasitic organism inside him only registered during a manifestation.

`Perhaps. But I'm not sure if this creature is a parasite.

The two of them may well have a symbiotic relationship. It's difficult to tell without proper examination.'

I began studying the displays on the opposite face of the central console from where the Doctor was standing. 'What about the weakness in the space-time continuum?'

`That's much easier to identify now the TARDIS is not moving through the continuum. The weakness is much clearer - it's to our north, still a few hundred miles away.

Corra Linn is definitely the site of the rift.'

I noticed a warning light blinking on the console panel nearest to me. 'Doctor, I think you'd better have a look at this.'

`Just a moment. I just need to lock off these dials and -'

`Not in a moment, Doctor - now!' I insisted.

The Doctor hurried to join me. 'Oh no,' he whispered upon seeing what was blinking. The weakness - it's expanding.

Somebody is approaching the rift!'

Kempshall sank slowly to the bottom of the Clyde. The water was thick with silt and other particles, so what light penetrated the surface quickly melted away, replaced with an inky blackness. The lieutenant felt his breath catch as he plunged deeper into the water, cold seeping into the diving suit from his surroundings. He gave the guide rope a single tug. After a few moments more air surged down to him.

Kempshall bent his knees and spread his legs slightly to brace for

impact, arms held out to ensure the diving suit did not tip over.

Finally, his heavy boots touched the bottom, their impact cushioned by a thick layer of sediment underfoot. He looked about himself but could certainly see no glowing light. The orders from Her Majesty had been rather vague about quite what it was he could expect. Kempshall decided his best move was to find the edge of the riverbank and begin searching outwards from there. Surrounded by blackness, he closed his eyes and let his other senses take control. Floating down in the suit had given the lieutenant that familiar sense of weightlessness, all his earthly cares removed. But now the downward pressure from the lumps of lead secured to his helmet was all too evident. His bulky, gloved hands reached ahead, fingers stretching out in search of unseen obstacles.

Fallen trees or rocks might be lurking down here, waiting to trip him up. If he should become entangled in the branches of some dead oak, those above would not be able to pull him out, nor could they send anyone else down to rescue him.

The lieutenant proceeded with caution.

Eventually he found the side,' one hand brushed against a rock protruding into the river at head height. A trickle of sweat ran down his nose and his breath was coming in shorter and shorter gasps. More air, he needed more air. The lieutenant gave the guide rope another sharp tug. As he did so the protruding rock shifted in his grasp, then came away from the side of the bank.

A glowing white light burst outwards from where the rock had been, enveloping Kempshall. Even with his eyes closed he could see the light, such was its intensity. He reached into the light and clawed at its edges. More rocks fell away, creating a wider opening. As the gap increased, the glare softened and became less harsh. The lieutenant eased one eye open a fraction, then slowly opened the other. He felt the light reach out to greet him, like the warmth of a mother's embrace...

Johnson and Hawthorne spent a wasted morning in Lanark trying to persuade someone to collect Lieutenant Ashe's body. The local undertaker steadfastly refused to countenance a trip to Corra Linn. He eventually agreed to supply them with a plain pine box with rope handles hanging out of its sides. 'Bring it back here and I'll do what's right. But I won't set foot within a mile of that place.' So the two soldiers marched back into camp carrying the simplest of coffins. The

pair picked up the corpse in its canvas bag and were lifting it into the rectangular box when Johnson jerked his hands away. His end of the body fell to the ground, Ashe's head striking the pine box with a wet smack. Hawthorne, still holding on to the dead man's feet, glared at the younger soldier.

'What the hell are you doing, Nicholas?'

'It moved.' Johnson said under his breath.

'What moved?'

'The corpse, Thorny - the bloody corpse moved!'

'Don't be ridiculous. The lieutenant here is stiff as a board.'

'I'm telling you, that thing moved.' Johnson insisted. 'Turn it in, Nicholas, we ain't got all day. Just pick up his head and we'll stick him in the box. He can dance about all he wants once we've got the lid on.'

'I can't...'

'Can't or won't? Just pick him up!'

Johnson was reluctantly bending down to grab the canvas bag when it twitched. 'Don't tell me you didn't see that, Thorny! Don't tell me you didn't see that!'

Hawthorne nodded slowly. 'I saw it, but I don't believe it.'

He looked down at his own hands, still holding the canvas-bound feet of the late Lieutenant Ashe. The legs suddenly started kicking, as if trying to get free of their shroud.

Hawthorne dropped them to the ground and stepped backwards, almost staggering as he did. 'This can't be happening. People don't come back from the dead...'

'How long has he been down there?' Lance Corporal Clark asked. He was standing on the edge of the pontoon with the sergeant, peering down into the water. A few bubbles broke the surface, but there had been no other sign of life from below for what seemed an age. Vollmer consulted the fob watch his father had given him after enrolling with the army.

The position of its hands seemed to suggest Kempshall had only been underwater a few minutes, but several pairs of men had already

exhausted themselves keeping the flywheels of the bellows box turning. The sergeant examined his watch more carefully and noticed the minute hand was creeping backwards, moving around the face anti-clockwise.

`Typical of this to go awry when I need it!' He put the watch away and scratched the back of his neck. `Have there been any more tugs on the guide rope?'

Clark shook his head. 'Not for some time. And the men are getting very tired. I don't know how much longer they can keep the pump working'

'Right. Unless we get a signal in the next few minutes, I'm giving the order to begin pulling the lieutenant back up. He can always go down for another look later.' Vollmer stared down into the water, trying to see some flicker of light in the darkness.

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: The Doctor ran around the central console, throwing switches and adjusting dials at great speed. He pushed past me roughly, apologising as he went. I offered to help but he was too busy trying to reset the TARDIS controls to explain.

Finally, he paused for breath.

'If the weakness in the continuum grows too large, it will begin leaking outwards'

'What will that cause?'

'Localised temporal distortions, to begin with - time speeding up and slowing down, even moving backwards instead of forwards. Disorientation for anyone within the vicinity of the weakness, probably taking the form of visions or hallucinations.'

'And the longer-term effects?'

The Doctor turned on the scanner. 'Soon the distortion will begin to spread further from the source, rewriting the physical laws of this planet, then infecting the worlds around it. Earth would suffer the most catastrophic fallout, but if the weakness went unchecked...' He dived under the console unit and pulled aside a panel to reveal a mess of wiring and circuits.

His hands dug into these components, hastily rearranging their configurations.

'It could envelope the solar system,' I realised, 'even this sector of space...'

'Exactly. Such an imbalance could not be sustained for long. The nature of this universe demands equilibrium. When its balance is upset, the universe will find a way of correcting that' He paused from his rewiring. 'What can you see on the scanner?'

I looked up and gasped. Superimposed over an image of Britain was a dark-red stain. I pushed a button on the nearest control panel,

increasing magnification. The crimson discolouration grew larger as the scanner image closed in on the source.

'That's the lowlands of Scotland,' the Doctor said,

'Lanarkshire and the Borders. Corra Linn is located in the middle of that' The red stain was centred on Corra Linn, its edges stretching outwards like capillaries.

'Someone must be passing through the rift right now,' I realised. 'They can't have received the telegram warning them away from it. Can we stop them from here?'

'I'm not sure,' the Doctor admitted, 'but we have to try. The longer they stay in contact with the rift, the greater the damage it causes. Nyssa, I need your help, but this could be very dangerous'

I nodded quickly. 'Just tell me what to do'

Vollmer decided they had waited long enough. 'That's it, pull him up,' he said. There was a groan of dismay from the exhausted soldiers resting on the riverbank. The sergeant glared at his men. 'I'm sorry, are you feeling a wee bit tired, is that it? Well, I couldn't give a tinker's damn for that. Now move!' he bellowed.

The soldiers sprang to their feet and ran on to the pontoon, taking up positions on either side of the guide rope that snaked into the water. The two men turning the flywheels stopped to let the others past, getting an earful from Vollmer for their courtesy. 'Who told you two to stop? The lieutenant's still got to breathe down there!' The pair quickly returned to their task, getting the pump back up to speed.

Vollmer nodded to Clark, who took command of the men at the guide rope.

'All right, you horrible lot, let's see you put your backs into it. Pull!' Clark screamed. The soldiers strained and tugged on the rope but failed to bring an inch of it above the surface of the water. Clark's crimson cheeks turned redder than ever. 'I said pull! I've seen more effort from my two daughters fighting over a china doll!'

The soldiers redoubled their efforts but still made no progress. Clark rolled his eyes and looked to the sergeant for help. Vollmer strode to the edge of the pontoon and gave the rope a pull upwards. 'Must be snagged on something underwater. We'll just have to try harder. Clark, join in and we'll see if that makes any difference'

The two men joined the others, bracing their feet against the wooden floor of the pontoon and leaning backwards to create greater leverage. Vollmer filled his lungs with air before screaming out the order. 'Pull! Pull! Pull!'

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: The Doctor had pulled a fistful of components from beneath the central console and was wiring them directly into the dematerialisation circuits. 'I'm trying to impose a dimensional buffer on to the rift,' he explained. 'When throw the dematerialisation switch, the TARDIS will redirect that energy to where the weakness in the continuum is most prevalent. It will expunge any matter that has crossed over from the other side of the rift'

That would have the same effect on anyone from Earth inside the rift, I knew, pulling them back to this side. But even if the Doctor succeeded, he ran the risk of burning Alt half the circuits in the TARDIS. We would be stranded on Earth until they could be repaired. When I put my assessment to him, he nodded grimly.

'That's the best-case scenario, yes'

Ànd the worst-case?'

Explosive decompression of time and space within these walls. The old girl would tear herself apart, taking us with her.

The effects would be limited to the TARDIS interior, so the other passengers on the train are safe' The Doctor finished his rewiring. 'If you want to leave now, I would understand.

You don't have to share the risk with me'

I shook my head and smiled. 'Right now this is the closest place I've got to a home. So - what do you need me to do?'

The Doctor indicated three dials on a console unit. 'Those readings will indicate the degradation propensity of the buffer.'

All three must be equal when I finish the dematerialisation or else - well, let's just say all three must be equal'

I nodded my understanding and wished him good luck.

He smiled. 'And to you. Here goes!' He began the dematerialisation

process. The central column began to rise and fall, but its familiar wheezing, groaning sound was absent. Instead the TARDIS started to scream.

Hawthorne and Johnson had retreated a safe distance from the corpse, the younger soldier's fingers scrambling across the beads of a rosary, his prayers tumbling out in breathless succession. 'Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Hail Mary, full of grace...'

'Hush a minute,' Hawthorne urged. 'I can't hear myself think with you giving it hosanna all the time' Johnson ignored him, just repeating the same words over and over. Eventually Hawthorne slapped the beads from Johnson's hands to get his attention. 'I said shut up, Nicholas! I'm trying to listen!'

Johnson picked up the beads but did not resume praying.

Instead he leaned closer to the other soldier. 'Listen to what?'

'Breathing. I thought I could hear Lieutenant Ashe breathing' They both fell silent, straining to catch any sound.

A tiny whisper crept back to them.

'Daisy? Is that you, Daisy? I didn't mean to hurt you'

Hawthorne could feel a chill snake down his spine, shivers trembling his hands. The voice, it was that of Lieutenant Ashe. Hawthorne looked sideways at Johnson, who just nodded. He could also hear the voice, it seemed.

'Daisy? Please, you must forgive me. I just wanted to be your friend'

'Who the hell is he talking to?' Johnson whispered.

'I don't know,' Hawthorne said. 'I didn't know corpses could kick, let alone talk. Maybe that undertaker was right. Maybe this place is cursed. Must be if it can scare people to death and then bring them back to life again'

'Daisy, you don't understand!' Ashe's voice was getting louder now, becoming increasingly querulous. 'I didn't know there would be so

much blood. Please, Daisy, I - no! No -

noooo!' The lieutenant was screaming now, an animal howl of pain and terror. Then, just as quickly as it began, the howling ceased.

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal:

'Two readings are level,' I shouted, straining to be heard above the cries of the TARDIS, 'but the third is still oscillating!'

The Doctor nodded, hands dancing across the console, adjusting the controls in search of a solution. 'I'm re-routing power from the ship's ambient systems, trying to override this negative feedback from the rift' He twisted a dial and the TARDIS lurched sideways, the central column juddering as it rose and fell.

'Doctor! That only made things worse! Two dials oscillating now!'

'Switching back,' he replied, but reversing the dial made no difference. I felt my intestines begin to churn and pulsate, as if they were being scrambled from the inside out. My knees gave way and I fell to the floor, still grasping the side of the console. I tilted my head back, eyes trying to focus on the three dials.

'Doctor - all three are oscillating now!' A series of explosions rocked the console, roundels flying across the room as flames and smoke began filling the interior.

'She's breaking up!' the Doctor shouted. 'I'll have to risk re-materialising!'

I dragged myself to my knees, all the time keeping my focus on the trio of dials. At last the three needles were in nearly identical positions. Wait! The dials - they're almost in synch!' I shouted.

'Are they level?'

'In a moment... nearly there... nearly... Now!'

The Doctor plunged forward three levers at once. After that I remember nothing...

Three soldiers ran into the encampment, having been patrolling its perimeter. They found Johnson and Hawthorne trying to look innocent beside the canvas bag containing lieutenant Ashe's corpse. 'What the hell is going on here?'

one of the guards demanded.

Hawthorne forced himself to smile. 'Sorry about that. I was playing a joke on Johnson here, making him think the lieutenant's corpse was moving'

The trio turned away in disgust and stomped off, muttering darkly. Once they had gone Hawthorne nudged the bag with his boot but got no response. He gave the corpse a hefty kick but still it did not move. 'Guess he's gone back to wherever he came from,' Hawthorne said. 'Nicholas, give me a hand'

The two soldiers quickly lifted the bagged body into the pine box and shoved the lid on, before sitting atop the coffin.

Hawthorne pulled out his tobacco tin and began refilling his pipe.

'How did you do it, Thorny?' Johnson asked.

'Do what?'

'How'd you get the corpse to kick like that? I've seen people throw their voice and suchlike, but getting the corpse to jump about - that was quite a trick'

Hawthorne sighed, realising he still didn't have any matches. He tipped the contents of his pipe back into the tobacco tin and pocketed both again. 'I did nothing, Nicholas.

Lieutenant Ashe did it all by himself.'

'You mean he's still alive?' Johnson jumped up. 'Shouldn't we let him out? He won't be able to breathe in there'

'He won't be able to breathe anywhere. He's deader than my fat Aunt Agnes'

'But you said -'

what I had to so those three would go back to what they were doing.' Hawthorne stood up. 'What you and I saw - it's best we forget it. You tell people you've seen corpses kicking and talking, they'll find you a nice room in an asylum somewhere and they'll never let you out again. Forget you ever saw that, Nicholas, it's for the best. I already have'

Vollmer had kept the men turning the fly-wheels but he was fast giving up hope. All efforts to raise Kempshall from the depths had failed. Before he went into the water the lieutenant had said his longest recorded dive was forty-seven minutes. He had certainly outdone that. Whether Kempshall was still alive to enjoy the achievement was another matter.

Clark was lying down on the pontoon, one hand resting on the guide rope in case of any movement. 'What do we do if his body can't be recovered?' the lance corporal asked. 'Can you have a burial at sea in fresh water?'

'Don't talk stupid, Clark,' Vollmer replied. 'The Navy will send another diving suit and somebody else can go down, to see what happened to the lieutenant. We'll give it another hour, then I'll go down river and have a telegram sent back to General Doulton telling him what's happened. Leave the thinking to the men in charge'

'But that could take days,' Clark said. 'We don't want to be stuck here for -' He stopped abruptly, twisting his head slowly sideways to look at the rope. It jumped twice in his hand, lay still for a few seconds, then was jerked twice again. 'It's him!'

He's still alive! Bloody hell, he's still alive!

Vollmer was already on his feet, buttoning the front of his tunic. 'How many tugs?'

'Four - two short, a pause, then two short again.'

'Two short tugs - that means pull him back up!' The sergeant called to the men on the riverbank, some of whom were already running towards the pontoon. 'Come on, you lot!'

He's still alive! Move it!

Within seconds the men were in place on either side of the rope, pulling it out of the water with all their might, the blisters on their hands and muscle strains forgotten.

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: My recollection of events resumes with utter darkness. 1

remember opening my eyes and seeing nothing. The Flack was so complete I wondered whether one of the explosions had blinded me. I rolled on to my side and sat up, aware of a myriad of bumps and

bruises around my body. It felt as though I had been pummelled by a thousand fists, no doubt a side effect of the TARDIS trying to pull itself apart. Within a few hours I would be black and blue, but there were more pressing concerns. I called out for the Doctor, not sure whether he was nearby.

'Yes,' he replied quietly. 'I'm just -' A click interrupted him and dim lighting began to illuminate the console room. The Doctor was standing over the central unit, examining the damage to its circuitry.

I found myself near one of the console room's walls. The final blast must have thrown me across the room, explaining the dull pain lancing across my body. I stood up and joined the Doctor at the console. 'Well? Did we succeed?'

'Hard to say. We're still in one piece, so that's a good start.

What monitoring systems are left suggest the dimensional buffer was successfully imposed over the rift - but only temporarily. The ship shut down to protect itself from feedback'

I began checking the console unit nearest to me. The results were not encouraging, a conclusion the Doctor soon underlined.

'It will take hours, perhaps days to repair all of the circuits.

We certainly won't be able to repeat that manoeuvre for some time. If we want to stop the rift getting any larger, we will have to do that without the help of the TARDIS.'

I wondered aloud how long I had been unconscious. The Doctor said creating the dimensional buffer had disabled the ship's chronometric systems. 'Best pop outside and see where the train is,' he said with a smile. 'Maybe that will give us an indication' The Doctor flipped the lever that opened the external doors of the TARDIS and began walking expectantly towards them. But the two heavy panels remained stubbornly shut.

'Do you want me to try?' I asked.

But repeated efforts produced no better results. The doors groaned inwards slightly and then stopped altogether. The Doctor's shoulders sagged. 'It seems we'll have to do this the old-fashioned way. Nyssa, would you be so kind as to fetch me the manual door crank?'

Getting Kempshall up from the depths of the river was an exhausting

process. Even when the soldiers succeeded in raising the diving suit to the surface, it took another mighty effort to heave Kempshall out of the water and on to the pontoon. The lieutenant did not make the process any easier by waving his arms and gesticulating wildly. Eventually Vollmer realised what was causing Kempshall's distress. The hose had become folded upon itself and no air was getting into the diving suit. 'Dexter! Help me get the porthole open on this helmet!' The two men quickly undid the screws and removed the glass window.

Kempshall took huge gasps, filling his lungs with air. While the lieutenant was recovering, Clark helped the sergeant lift off the cumbersome metal helmet. They were shocked to find Kempshall's hair had turned white while he was underwater, acquiring exactly the same colourless quality as that seen on Ashe's corpse. Did that mean he would suffer the same fate?

What was down in the depths that could cause such a sudden change? What had Kempshall seen to turn his hair white?

Vollmer and the lance corporal exchanged a glance but said nothing for the moment, focusing on getting the naval officer out of his diving suit. When the lieutenant was able to talk, he beckoned Vollmer close to him. 'Not in front of the men, Sergeant. What I have to say is for your ears only, understood?' Vollmer nodded. He had Clark take the men back up to camp on the hillside. It had been a long day and they all needed a meal and some rest.

'How long was I down there?' Kempshall asked when alone with the sergeant.

'Difficult to say, sir. Regrettably, my watch seems to have packed up. But the sun is already setting, so several hours at least'

'Several hours?' The lieutenant was incredulous. He shook his head, not believing what he was hearing. 'Are you quite certain of that?'

'Yes, sir. To be honest, we thought you were probably dead and your body had become caught on a sunken tree branch'

'I know it took some minutes to reach the bottom of the river, and just as long to haul me back up again but hours... I only visited them for a few moments'

Vollmer's brow furrowed. The lieutenant was not making much sense. 'Visiting them, sir? Who were you visiting?'

Kempshall smiled. 'My parents, I saw my parents. They were waiting for me there, waiting to welcome me'

'To welcome you?'

'Yes, to the Other Side. They were like angels, Vollmer. I don't mean they had wings or anything, but they had such a look of contentment and peace about them. They were just as I remembered them, my father so noble and upright, my mother - so beautiful. They reached out to me, said that they forgave me...' The lieutenant's eyes misted with tears. 'You know something, I haven't cried since they died all those years ago.'

When the train reached its destination, Doulton was surprised to discover the Doctor and Lady Nyssa emerging from the goods carriage. 'My goodness, don't tell me you've spent that journey amongst all the cargo!' Doulton said, striding forward to shake the Doctor's hand.

'Not all of it, no. Nyssa and I just wanted to make sure my equipment had made the trip north safe and sound'

The general could not help noticing the new clothes into which the young woman had changed. 'What interesting garments, if you don't mind my saying so'

'Not at all, General - it's traditional clothing for a woman where I come from,' she replied. 'Crinolines and silk gowns may be fitting for the royal court, but I doubt they will be so compatible with our destination'

Doulton was taken aback. He grasped the Doctor by an elbow and led him to one side. 'Am I to understand you intend for the Lady Nyssa to accompany us all the way to where the contingent is camped? I would have thought it more proper for her to take lodgings with a family of good repute nearby, perhaps down river in New Lanark.'

The Doctor smiled benignly. 'Don't worry, General. I would never expose Nyssa to any harm or danger without seeking her approval first. Trust me when I say she is quite capable of taking care of herself in almost any situation. That young lady has a resilience that would do credit to any soldier serving the Empire' The Doctor guided Doulton back towards Nyssa.

'So, how long until we arrive at our destination?'

'Not tonight, I fear,' the General said. 'We should reach Lanark before

midnight. My men and I will make camp, while lodgings will be secured at a nearby coaching house for yourself and Lady Nyssa. In the morning we shall press on to complete our journey and make contact with the rest of the troops'

`Your men?' Nyssa asked.

Doulton pointed down the platform at two dozen soldiers standing to attention. 'They joined the train en route and will accompany us hereafter. I could hardly lead an expeditionary force into this new world with just those already stationed at Con-a Linn. Now, if you'll excuse me, must send a telegram ahead to Carstairs Junction, giving them notice of our arrival'

He marched away briskly, striding through the dispersing crowds of passengers on the platform. Doulton just caught the Doctor's next comment.

Àn expeditionary force? I don't like the sound of that'

Vollmer had forbidden anyone and everyone from bothering Kempshall, who had staggered off to his tent. 'Leave the man in peace,' the sergeant told the others. 'We don't know what the lieutenant witnessed down there but it was enough to turn his hair white. Something similar happened to Ashe and he died as a result. Kempshall will talk about it in his own time.

Now leave him be' There had been some grumbling but the men accepted the prohibition.

The sergeant couldn't take his own advice. He waited until the others had gone about their duties before slipping into the lieutenant's tent and gently shaking Kempshall awake. 'Sorry to disturb you, sir, but I've got orders to send word about what you found'

The lieutenant nodded, pulling himself up into a seated position. 'Yes, of course, Sergeant. But I'm not sure what more I can tell you that will help much. It's closer to a dream than anything else.'

`Perhaps this may help, sir,' Vollmer said, handing him a small shaving mirror. Kempshall looked into it and was startled by his change of appearance.

Ì say! Whatever has happened to my hair?'

`That's what I was going to ask you'

'Well, I don't know I've got any answer to that. But I'll do my best' The lieutenant recounted his journey to the bottom of the river, his discovery of the gleaming white light and how the brilliance seemed to draw him inside itself. 'Felt like I was travelling through a tunnel,' he said. 'I looked down and could see a silver cord extending from my stomach outwards into the distance ahead of me. I grabbed hold of that and used it like a guide rope to pull myself forwards. Then I was there -

on the Other Side' Kempshall fell silent, his face alive with the wonder of what he had seen.

'The other side of what, sir?' Vollmer asked.

'The Other Side - the afterlife,' the lieutenant explained.

'My parents were waiting for me there, as I said before, smiling and welcoming. They told me we were being reunited, that I would become like them. All around me I could see other angels. I don't mean they had wings or floated on clouds. It was more like a state of complete happiness and contentment, being totally at peace. I -' Kempshall shrugged helplessly. 'It's difficult to describe unless you've seen it yourself. You said I was underwater for several hours?'

'That's right, sir. Four or even five'

'But that can't be correct. I was on the Other Side for a minute at most. I remember my mother and father reaching towards me, wanting to take my hand. I was afraid but they reassured me, said it would be fine. I just had to trust them.

So I put out my hand to take theirs and -' Kempshall stopped, trying to find the words for his experience. 'I didn't want to come back, but something made me. It was like a dark, grasping hand had reached out from behind me and pulled me backwards into the river. I tried to fight it but the grip was too strong, too powerful. Then I was back on the bottom of the river, surrounded by darkness. The place where I found the white light, it had been sealed again. I could still see tiny glimpses of brightness but I just felt so tired, so exhausted, that I had to come back to the surface to rest. I started tugging on the guide rope -well, you know the rest'

Vollmer looked down at the notebook resting in his hands.

He had been planning to make a record of the lieutenant's experiences for despatch to Windsor, but he had not written a word. How was he

supposed to explain what he had just heard? The sergeant stood up and bid Kempshall a good night. 'We can talk more in the morning, sir.' But Vollmer was wrong.

Chapter Five

February 18, 1863

The woman is screaming, her arms beating against the chest of her attacker. He punches her in the face, her nose breaking with a resounding crack. Her screams subside into guttural moans and sobbing, blood running sideways across her cheeks to the polished veneer of woodblock floor. Say that you love me, the man urges, bearing down on her with all his weight. Say it, Daisy, tell me that you love me. His hands caress her neck, lovingly stroking that alabaster skin.

Say you love me, he pleads. His thumbs tighten as his passion grows. Say you love me, he begs, squeezing her as hard as he could. His breath is coming so fast now he doesn't hear the bones breaking. Her eyes roll back in her head and she is gone. He sits back, shocked into silence. You try to back away and he hears you and turns, startled by your presence. What are you doing here, he demands. Who are you? He looks down at the woman's lifeless features and realises what he has done. He turns back to you. I didn't mean to hurt her. I didn't -

Nyssa was twisting herself about, desperate to escape the vision. She tried to force her eyes open, to find herself safely awake. If she could just open her eyes she wouldn't have to see these things. But instead she felt trapped between the dreaming and being awake, half in one realm and half in the other. She knew what she had just seen was a nightmare but there was something more to it than that. She had been a witness to something, a terrible secret. What was happening to her? Why was she being haunted by these visions in her sleep?

'Nyssa? Are you all right?' The Doctor's kindly voice jolted her awake.

She opened her eyes with a gasp. 'What happened?

Where am I?'

'In a carriage, on the way to Corra Linn,' he replied. 'We should be there soon' The Doctor was sitting opposite her, watching Nyssa with

concerned eyes. 'You fell asleep. You were having a nightmare'

'Worse than that,' she said. 'A vision, as if I were standing watching it happen in front of me and I was powerless to save her.'

'Save who?'

'Daisy. Her name was Daisy. A man was hurting her, murdering her. He didn't mean to kill her but he couldn't stop himself. Then he looked right at me. He was going to hurt me next!' The Doctor took Nyssa's hands in his own and held them.

'Nyssa, listen to me. You're perfectly safe now, the man in your vision - he can't harm you. You're safe, you must believe that,' he implored.

She nodded, acknowledging the truth of what the Doctor said. 'At was just so real. Lately, I've been seeing other things, other visions. Some are events that have already happened. I think that last one was from the past. Others are more like glimpses of the future. I can't make sense of them.

Once I felt myself being drawn into somebody else's dream.

That was while we were at Windsor. I thought it might have been James's dream'

""These visions - do they only come when you're asleep?'

'So far,' Nyssa said. 'But they keep getting stronger, more vivid.'

The Doctor sat back on his side of the carriage. 'Perhaps the general was right. Perhaps it is wrong to bring you Isere.

We don't know what effect it will have on you. These visions could be related to this rift in the continuum.'

'Another mystery for us to investigate?'

'Yes. We seem to be making quite a collection,' the Doctor said wryly.

Nyssa smiled, the last shadows of her vision melting away.

'Business as usual'

Outside, Doulton's voice could be heard calling everyone to a halt. The carriage slowed and then stopped. The general appeared outside the window, the buttons on his tunic gleaming in the morning sunshine.

'Doctor, Lady Nyssa, I'm afraid I shall have to ask you both to disembark. We are approaching New Lanark and must now leave the track to find our own way to the encampment on foot'

The two passengers climbed out to find themselves on the ridge of a hill, a few stone cottages visible further back along the track. Doulton's squad of men had been divided into groups. Six men were carrying a tall wooden crate they had brought from the train, a dozen were dealing with the TARDIS

and the other six were bringing up the rear. 'I don't know what you've got inside that police box of yours, Doctor,' the general commented, 'but my men say it's dashed heavy!'

'Yes, I'm sorry about that. Normally it is able to redistribute its weight across five dimensions but that facility was damaged on the train journey up from London'

'Really? Well, whatever you say, Doctor.'

* * *

Rather than simply sending a telegram from Scotland Yard, Chief Inspector Lovesey had opted to deliver his news to Victoria personally, thinking it might be an opportunity to make a good impression. Standing before the Queen in her private office at Windsor, he was now regretting that decision.

'We understand you have information regarding our Scientific Advisor, Dr John Smith,' she snapped.

'Yes, Your Majesty.'

'Well, out with it! We are meant to be departing for Balmoral today but our departure has been delayed yet again to grant you this audience. Do not delay us further.'

'No, Your Majesty, indeed not,' Lovesey replied, bowing deeply. 'Sir Henry sent a communication to Scotland Yard informing us that this individual -'

'The Doctor. He has a name, you know!'

'Yes. Thank you, ma'am. Informing us that this Dr John Smith had come to Windsor to investigate some phenomena on behalf of the Yard and that Your Majesty had requested he travel north into

Scotland as part of these inquiries'

`So far you have only told us what we already know, Chief Inspector. Pray continue with fresh information, or else we shall consider this conversation at an end!'

Lovesey swallowed hard and bowed again. 'Yes, Your Majesty. It's just that...' He turned to Ponsonby for support but found no succour there. 'It's just that we have no Dr John Smith attached to the Yard. Nor, indeed, anyone else of that name working for us. A search of all the constabulary of the greater metropolitan area revealed only one policeman answering to the name John Smith and he is a rather burly sergeant in Clerkenwell with black hair and a moustache, who hardly matches the description Sir Henry writ us. We also have no record of a Lady Nyssa of Traken, nor any knowledge of any place called Traken. We're rather At a loss to explain these two individuals, ma'am.'

'And your point, Chief Inspector? Why come all this way to tell us information you could have communicated by other means?'

Lovesey grimaced, trying to think of a more acceptable Answer than admitting to his arrogant folly. 'We believe the Doctor and his companion may be agents of a foreign power or enemies of the Empire. They may well be highly dangerous and should be apprehended for questioning immediately.' Lovesey bowed again, relieved at having said all he needed to say without further raising the Queen's ire.

The Queen sat contemplating this news. The Doctor had ample opportunity to press an attack against us here at Windsor had that been his mission, while the Lady Nyssa seemed a most amenable young lady of gentle disposition.

We find your allegations against them hard to credit.'

'Nevertheless, Your Majesty, these charges must be investigated further,' Sir Henry interjected. 'At the very least this Doctor and his companion should be questioned.'

General Doulton should be notified that he has impostors in his midst, people who may well be agents of some enemy power.'

Victoria could not deny the logic of these suggestions.

`Very well. Sir Henry, send a telegram of the utmost urgency to the general informing him of this fresh information and advising caution

when dealing with the Doctor and Lady Nyssa. But we also wish him to be guarded against taking any precipitous action in this matter.' The private secretary nodded his assent and began to withdraw from the chamber, taking Lovesey with him.

* * *

Hawthorne was beginning to wonder whether it was Corra Linn or himself that was cursed. When Kempshall did not rise in time for breakfast, Vollmer had sent Hawthorne to see how the lieutenant was faring. Kempshall's lifeless eyes told the private all he needed to know. He stepped backwards out of the tent and bumped into the impatient Vollmer.

'Well, how is he?' the sergeant demanded.

'He's been better,' Hawthorne replied, holding open the tent flap. Vollmer caught sight of Kempshall's sallow features and hurried inside. A brief examination of the corpse indicated the lieutenant had been dead for some hours.

'I don't fancy explaining this to General Doulton,' the sergeant muttered as he left the tent.

'Explaining what to me?' bellowed a bullish voice. The general strode into the encampment, flanked by two civilians and two dozen soldiers carrying an assortment of large boxes and equipment. 'Well, what don't you fancy explaining, Sergeant?'

Vollmer snapped to attention and saluted Doulton, Hawthorne reacting almost as quickly. The general acknowledged their salute and told them to stand easy.

Vollmer took a deep breath and briefly recounted events at Corra Linn, concluding with the discovery of Kempshall's corpse. Hawthorne was grateful his name was not mentioned in connection with either death. Doulton was more interested in knowing why Kempshall had gone ahead with the dive in express defiance of orders sent by telegram.

The sergeant said no such communication had been received. The general scowled at this and went into the tent to see the lieutenant's body for himself. 'Seems like a rum do and no mistake!' Doulton announced. 'Doctor, perhaps you could have a look and see if you can deduce what did for this poor fellow?'

Hawthorne stepped aside to let the male civilian into the tent. The private decided this new arrival could not have been much older than thirty, judging by his unlined face and almost boyish demeanour. But there was a self-assurance and natural authority that suggested the Doctor had wisdom beyond his apparent years. Certainly the general seemed happy to let him take charge of ascertaining the cause of death.

The private was just as intrigued by the other civilian, a diminutive woman with striking eyes and an aristocratic air.

She looked about herself with undisguised curiosity, unabashed at being so near to a dead body. Her clothing was most unusual, a dark crimson jacket and trousers of a fabric Hawthorne had never seen before. The garments demurely covered her arms and legs, but it was still surprising to see a woman dressed like a man. The private found himself wondering what her relationship was to the Doctor. They had an easy familiarity but gave no sign of being married.

'Nyssa,' the Doctor called from the tent. 'Come and have a look at this.' She walked inside, smiling at the private as she passed. Doulton led the sergeant away to inspect the rest of the troops already stationed at the encampment. The general was busy berating Vollmer for the loss of two officers to some unknown enemy and insisting they increase the number of sentries around the camp. Hawthorne remained on guard outside the tent, straining to hear the low, whispered conversation between the two civilians.

'What do you make of this?' the Doctor asked.

'Dead for some hours, as rigor mortis has set in,' she replied. 'No signs of violence or any obvious cause of death.'

His white hair belongs to an older man but he has no matching characteristics that would confirm such a hypothesis. His eyes - as if he had seen something utterly terrifying...

As if he had been scared to death.'

And this was the person we detected entering the rift yesterday?'

'Yes, judging by what that sergeant just told Doulton. He must have been ejected from the rift when I imposed the dimensional buffer. But I don't think that is directly connected to his death. This man suffered coronary failure after seeing something so shocking, his heart simply gave out from the fear.'

'Why didn't the soldiers get the telegram warning them not to dive? Could someone have intercepted it?' the young woman asked.

'Perhaps. It's more likely the telegram was never despatched'

'You think Ponsonby held back from sending it - why?'

'Sir Henry has his own agenda. No doubt he has discovered by now that Scotland Yard has never heard of us.

Time is running out'

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal: After reporting our findings to Doulton, the Doctor and I watched as he gave a brief address to the soldiers at Corra Linn. He announced plans for another sortie to the bottom of the river. 'Her Majesty ordered me to learn more about this so-called gateway. We must not let the unfortunate deaths of Lieutenants Ashe and Kempshall deter us from this task.

Rather than ask any of you men to face whatever dangers might lurk at the bottom of this river, I shall go myself. A good leader leads by example and I should like to be remembered as a good leader.'

His rousing words brought three cheers from the men, particularly those who had just arrived with us. I noticed the other soldiers seemed less enthusiastic, but dutifully joined in. After Doulton had dismissed his men to begin making preparations, he approached us, full of bullish confidence.

The Doctor tried to dissuade the general.

'I must ask you to reconsider this course of action. The area around the rift is dangerous and must be treated with extreme caution. Also, and I apologise for pointing this out, but you are no longer the youngest of men. Such a dive could place an intolerable strain upon your body.'

'Nonsense, man! I'm fit as a fiddle,' Doulton insisted.

I suggested the Doctor could go in the general's place, but Doulton would not hear of it. 'I have never asked anyone to do something I was not willing to do myself,' he said, 'and I am not about to start now I will make the dive. However, you may accompany me, Doctor, to ensure nothing goes awry' It seemed the general had brought a second diving suit with him - that was what the tall wooden crate brought by train contained.

‘I dive in an hour,’ Doulton told us. ‘If you wish to come with me, Doctor, I advise against tardiness’

We spent the intervening sixty minutes inside the TARDIS.

While I set about repairing the ship's most important systems the Doctor was lashing together an electronic device no bigger than the palm of his hand. ‘It's not perfect but should be enough for the job,’ he said eventually.

‘What job?’

‘This is a force-field generator. When activated it should create a temporal bubble around the general and myself. This will enable us to pass through the rift without disrupting the dimensional buffer, preventing the weakness from spreading.’

I explained about reconfiguring the controls so I could keep watch over the rift during their dive. ‘I might even be able to monitor your progress, if that generator gives off a strong enough temporal signal. I've also wired in a kill switch, in case of any more energy surges from beyond the rift.’

All that seemed to please the Doctor. ‘There's no telling what I'll find on the other side of the rift. You know what to do if I don't make it back and the rift starts to expand?’

‘Panic?’ I joked, trying to cheer him up. It brought a weak smile to his lips.

‘Best leave that to the military, they're the experts’

I put joking aside and gave him my real answer. ‘Get everyone evacuated from the area, then move the TARDIS

to a safe location while monitoring the situation here’

The Doctor nodded. ‘Hopefully it won't come to that but you never know. Judging by Kempshall's experience, time operates differently on the other side of the rift. It may flow at a different speed, or may not have a linear progression at all. So don't worry if it takes longer than you'd expect for us to come back up’

I handed him a plastic tube filled with green, viscous liquid that I had uncovered in a storeroom while looking for tools.

'Shake it violently for a few seconds and the contents begin to phosphoresce. Should give you some illumination down there'

* * *

It was noon when the Doctor and Douulton plunged into the Clyde. They quickly sank to the bottom of the river, weak sunshine overhead soon lost to the darkness. The Doctor pulled the tube of phosphorescent liquid from a belt tied round his waist and began to shake it. After a few seconds the contents came alive, casting an emerald hue about him. The Doctor saw Douulton to his right, the green tube giving a sickly hue to the general's features. Douulton pointed ahead where a dull grey glow was just visible through the murky, brackish water. Both divers cautiously made their way towards the light.

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal:

I watched the Doctor and Douulton plunge into the water before hurrying back to the TARDIS. Once inside the control room I activated the temporal sensors. A steady signal from the Doctor's force-field generator meant I was able to monitor their progress as they approached the rift. It was represented on the scanner by a red flare where the continuum was weakest. But just as the Doctor was at the edge of the red zone, alarms began flashing across the central console. The readings told me all I needed to know. Despite the Doctor's force-field generator, another massive surge of artron energy was building around the rift. I waited as long as I could but eventually had to hit the till switch, fearing irreparable damage to the TARDIS.

The general reached the riverbank first, drawn towards the grey light. As it grew nearer, Douulton realised the glow was caused by dozens of tiny beams escaping into the silt-laden water from behind a wall of rocks. He reached to grasp one of the stones, but his hand was pulled away by the Doctor. The general tore his hand free. This chap might be Her Majesty's scientific advisor, but the answer to this mystery lay behind the rocks, Douulton was certain of that. He grabbed the stones and began pulling at them. The barrier gave way easily, each rock tumbling away, revealing more of the dazzling brightness beyond. The general raised one gauntlet in front of his face to shield himself from the intense glare while he reached his other hand forward into the source. As he did so Douulton could feel his fingers stretch ahead of him. His arm began to follow into the light, pulling the rest of his body after it. He was aware of the Doctor grasping at his suit, adding a sudden drag on the acceleration effect, but it wasn't enough to stop

them moving forwards. The general closed his eyes and hoped God would be merciful.

`You may feel some disorientation at first, but that is only natural.'

Adric was kneeling beside the Doctor, looking down at him lying on the ground. 'All who journey here find the experience a little overwhelming when they first arrive'

The Doctor sat up and looked around. He was in a garden, a finely cut sward of green extending in all directions, broken only by rows of rose bushes. Each bush was laden with blooms, the petals open wide to bathe in the warm glow that suffused the atmosphere. The air was thick with their cloying, sweet smell. There was no sun or clouds above, just an endless azure. The sound of gentle laughter and murmurings could just be heard, but the voices were too far away for any words to be distinct.

`My diving suit,' the Doctor said, his hands patting against the fabric of his frock coat. 'Where is my diving suit?'

`You are still wearing it,' Adric replied. 'This is but a step upon the journey. Your mind must first accept the reality of where you are before it is ready to shed the physical form to which it has become so used. You come here to begin the process of acceptance.'

`So, all of this is taking place within my own mind?' the Doctor asked.

Adric smiled. 'I knew you would see what others require lifetimes to understand'

The Doctor got to his feet, brushing himself down and pulling his rolled Panama hat from a pocket in his frock coat.

'Very interesting. I suppose you are to be my spirit guide?

Shall we walk and talk? I'd like to see some more of this place before I go back' Clasp ing his hat firmly, the Doctor began walking briskly away, Adric running after him.

`Go back? But you can't go back'

`Why ever not? Don't you have reincarnation here?'

`There is no going back; Adric said, having caught up with him. 'You will come to accept this. You must accept this place, otherwise...'

Otherwise what?' The Doctor stopped abruptly. 'There is a threat implied in your statement, hardly the stuff of paradise or heaven or whatever you may choose to call this place. Otherwise what?'

Otherwise you will never know happiness,' Adric replied. 'This is a transitional state created from your own thoughts and memories. Once you begin to accept your surroundings, you will see them for what they truly are. I am here to welcome you, a familiar from your past, to help you find the way into the light'

A sort of life after death reception committee?'

'There's no need to be flippant,' Adric said sulkily.

'Really? I like to think there's every need.' The Doctor stood on tip-toes to peer into the distance, looking over the rose bushes. 'So where's the general? He came through with me at the same time. Shouldn't he also be getting the same warm welcome?'

Everyone who reaches the Other Side is greeted by memories drawn from their own lives as mortals. When I arrived Varsh was waiting to greet me.'

Adric, perhaps you can answer a few straightforward questions without resorting to vague hints, promises and threats.'

'There are no threats on the Other Side,' Adric replied.

'But the longer you continue to deny the reality of this world -'

'The longer I'll be stuck here among the rose bushes?'

The boy smiled. 'Something like that. Sorry. You must accept your own death'

'Ahh! But I didn't die,' the Doctor said. 'So how can I be in the afterlife, hmmm?'

A man's scream rent the air, terrible and filled with fear. The Doctor shouted into the air. 'Doulton? Can you hear me?'

Doulton!' But there was no reply. The Doctor turned on his former companion. 'That sounded to me very much like a man in agony.'

'You are mistaken,' Adric replied soothingly, reaching out towards the Doctor. 'Come with me so I can show you the truth'

He pulled away from the boy. 'I think not. Either all of this is just an illusion or else I am still wearing my diving suit and helmet and you are somehow blocking that fact from my perception'

'Don't do this,' Adric urged. 'Find true happiness here'

'Another time perhaps,' the Doctor replied. If I am wearing my diving suit, the guide rope should still be attached to my wrist. Now, what was the signal to begin hauling me back to the surface...?' He gripped his wrist firmly and gave it two sharp tugs.

Moments later a sudden jerk pulled the Doctor backwards across the sward. Adric remained where he stood, hands still reaching for the Doctor, begging him to stay. Another jerk and the Doctor was pulled into the air. He began gasping for breath, aware he was sweating profusely. As he rose into the sky darkness consumed him, cold and unforgiving, the sweet warmth of the rose garden fading away...

Vollmer assigned Douulton's two dozen men to keep the flywheels on the bellows box turning, happy to watch the cocky newcomers exhaust themselves. They had been giving Vollmer's own lads a hard time but enforced manual labour soon wiped their smug grins away. The sergeant put himself in charge of waiting for a signal from below, not wanting to entrust the job to anyone else. Losing two lieutenants in mysterious circumstances was bad enough, but accidentally drowning a general would not look good on anyone's service record.

Vollmer sat on the pontoon, one hand clasped on each of the guide ropes.

The sergeant didn't enjoy being this close to water. He had almost drowned at age seven while making a special visit to the public baths at Bethnal Green. An older lad called Maguire had been trying to bully him, forcing his head underwater for more than a minute. Vollmer had vomited for an hour afterwards but later got his revenge. He enrolled at a boys' boxing club and learned to defend himself, discovering a gift for pugilism. After besting all the other boys of his own age and several from the year above, Vollmer went back to the Bethnal Green baths where he broke his tormentor's nose and jaw. He got a thrashing from his father for fighting but took it without tears, content that justice had been done.

Two rapid jerks on one of the ropes got his attention. The sergeant yelled for his men, who ran on to the pontoon and took positions either side of the rope. At Vollmer's command they began hauling the

first diver back to the surface. Initially this proved almost impossible, like drawing the cork from an old bottle. But once the weight began moving, its progress upwards was surprisingly swift. When the Doctor was out of the water, Vollmer set to work unscrewing the front porthole on the diving helmet. Inside he could see trickles of blood running down from the Doctor's nose. The sergeant sent Johnson away to fetch Lady Nyssa. If her friend was dying, she would want to be with him. By the time Johnson had brought her back, the Doctor was out of his diving suit and beginning to recover.

'The general - is he here?' were the Doctor's first words.

When Vollmer shook his head, the Doctor urged him to raise the other submariner. The sergeant agreed and set his men to work on pulling Doulton back to the surface. This proved even more difficult than before, even when Vollmer joined in.

Eventually he was forced to take men away from the bellows box to help. He knew this risked starving Doulton of air but felt it was necessary.

At last the second diving suit broke the surface of the water. Several men jumped into the river to help the general on to the pontoon. Vollmer quickly opened the helmet's glass porthole so Doulton could breathe freely. The general gasped in fresh air, his features red and strained, droplets of sweat adorning his moustache. The sergeant assigned Clark and the rest of the men to helping Doulton out of the heavy, cumbersome diving suit. Meanwhile Vollmer eavesdropped as Lady Nyssa quizzed her associate about what he had witnessed.

It was troubling,' the Doctor said quietly. He described being in a rose garden, but could offer no proof he had visited the afterlife. 'I wanted to believe in what I was experiencing but felt only doubts. One thing is certain - the rift is a conjunction between two worlds. What about the instruments in the TARDIS? What did they indicate?'

Lady Nyssa said she had been collating results when summoned to the riverbank. The Doctor hushed her to silence, having noted Vollmer's interest in their conversation.

The stationmaster's son had run all the way from Lanark, urged onwards by his father's threats of violence if the telegram was not placed in the hands of the soldiers that day. The message had been sent from Windsor Castle, making its urgent delivery all the more pressing. But a third factor helped speed the boy's feet as he ran

through the k west towards Corra Linn.

For years rumours and whispers had passed through the district about the ghosts that haunted this narrow gorge after midnight. It was common knowledge that two coffins had already been filled by the soldiers. The boy had no wish to still be within the woods when the witching hour came, nor to provide any more business for the undertaker and his family.

He reached the encampment after dark, only finding it by virtue of the sparks flying upwards from a fire roaring in the centre of a clearing surrounded by tents. Breathless and exhausted, the boy collapsed to the ground, still clutching the envelope inscribed with the words 'Tor General Doulton's Eyes Only'. When he had recovered enough to speak, the youth was brought before Sergeant Vollmer.

'What's your name, lad?'

'Tommy, sir. Tommy Douglas,' the boy replied in a soft Scots burr.

'You have done well delivering this tonight. You may stay the night here before returning to your father in the morning with my thanks.'

'No, sir:

The sergeant considered insisting but decided against it. The lad was terrified, his eyes constantly flitting back and forth. In the past Vollmer would have dismissed the superstitions of the local people as pointless whimsy, but events since arriving here were fast shifting that opinion. The sergeant gave the boy a lantern and matches for lighting it again should the wind extinguish the flame. 'That should see you safely home, Tommy.

And here is a farthing for your troubles; he said, offering a coin.

But the boy refused to touch it. 'I'll be away then, if you dinnae mind.' He was just as resistant to having one of the soldiers escort him home. 'I'll be quicker on my own.'

Vollmer let the boy away. The telegram was the important thing now. The sergeant strode to the general's tent and asked to be admitted. Doulton had ordered two sentries be stationed outside to prevent him joining the other officers inside a plain pine box.

Once inside the tent, Vollmer snapped into a salute. But the general hardly acknowledged it. He seemed more intent on staring into a

mirror, examining his own features.

I stared death in the face many times,' Doulton said, 'but I suppose I never thought much beyond that. To a soldier, death is the inevitable defeat at the end of your lifetime. For some it comes gloriously on the battlefield, laying down their lives to save others or defend that in which they believe. For others, it comes later on a hospital bed, wracked with pain and fear.

Not many old soldiers die peacefully in their sleep, I'll wager.'

The general turned to Vollmer. 'Were your parents religious, Sergeant?'

'No, sir, not so as you'd notice. They had me baptised but we never attended church. My father believed you had to look out for yourself in this life. He always said he'd worry about the next life when he got there, if there was one. Never saw the point in religion myself, probably because my old man never did.'

'Like father, like son?'

'Something like that, yes, sir. Why do you ask?'

Doulton smiled. 'Today I looked upon the heavens. I visited the ever after, the spirit world if you will, and I saw it was all true, it was all real. Everything the preachers and pastors and vicars said in church - I didn't believe until today. All my life I had scoffed at such notions as being the placebo for weak minds and the cowardly. I have seen the afterlife and know it to be real. What more could any man want?'

'Indeed, sir.' Vollmer wasn't sure what to make of all this. The general had spent a lifetime barking orders and leading men to their deaths. Now he seemed a changed man, content and at peace. 'General, I came -'

But Doulton held up a hand to silence Vollmer. Now that I know it is real, I have determined to claim this afterlife, this realm beyond death for the greatness of the British Empire. I shall lead troops through the portal myself, an expeditionary force to began preparations for this great new adventure'

'How is that possible, sir? We only have two underwater suits.'

The general smiled. 'I had already arranged for a diving hell to be despatched to this location, in case it might prove to be of use. This

will enable me to take a dozen men down into the depths where we shall swim through the gateway to the Other Side. There we shall lay the groundwork for Her Majesty's visit.'

'Her Majesty? The Queen is coming here?'

Of course! It was at Her Majesty's request that this mission was begun. It will be the greatest honour of my career to lead her through the threshold between this life and the next.' Doulton chortled to himself. 'Perhaps she will make me governor-general of the afterlife. It would be a most prestigious honour to conquer and rule our newest colony.'

'Forgive me, General, but you cannot expect the Queen to swim...' Vollmer's voice trailed off. He had once read that Her Majesty was fond of taking a bathing machine down to the water's edge on the Isle of Wight but such an approach was hardly practical here.

Of course not, Sergeant! Do you take me for a simpleton?',

'No, sir, certainly not.'

I will need your help on this side of the gateway to provide access for the Queen. At dawn tomorrow morning you will send men upriver to create a temporary dam, stopping the flow of water down the Clyde. You will detail a dozen men to go downstream and open the flood gates on the existing dam, draining the water from the flooded valley. By the time Her Majesty arrives, the riverbed will be all but dry, exposing the gateway to open air. The Queen can walk through to the Other Side without getting her feet wet, or as near as damn it. What do you say to that?'

Vollmer was still contemplating the feasibility of Doulton's plan.

'It's possible, but problematic. I would suggest Lance Corporal Clark be put in charge of creating the dam upriver, he has experience of demolition work. But any such structure could only be a temporary measure. Also, the cotton mills at New Lanark will be grossly affected. The residents should probably be evacuated to higher ground for safety until the waters recede. If the river is completely and permanently blocked, there will be no water for the mills. The owners would be outraged, general. You will have stolen their livelihood: Doulton acknowledged all this but remained undeterred. The evacuation would be necessary even without the safety considerations,' he said, 'if only to safeguard Her Majesty during the royal visit. Once we have laid claim to the afterlife for the Empire, we can search for other gateways, ones hopefully in more convenient

locations. The owners of the mills can be compensated, their workers tumid new homes and jobs elsewhere. Right now, they are not my major concern. We must press ahead with my plans immediately. Is that understood?'

The sergeant nodded and saluted. He was about to leave before remembering the telegram. 'This was just delivered Mr you, sir.' Doulton opened the envelope and read the contents with interest before handing it to Vollmer. The sergeant quickly took in the message: UTMOST URGENCY: GENERAL

DOULTON COMMA DOCTOR SMITH AND LADY NYSSA ARE IMPOSTORS STOP ADVISE CAUTION IN DEALING

WITH THEM STOP GUARD AGAINST ANY PRECIPITOUS

ACTION STOP YOURS COMMA SIR HENRY PONSONBY

STOP.

Vollmer finished reading the telegram and handed it back to the general. 'What are your orders, sir?'

Doulton smiled. 'Have two guards keep watch over the 'Whir and his female conspirator during the night. Give the men orders to shoot if either of these impostors should attempt to approach or interfere with the gateway.' Vol mer nodded his agreement. The general crumpled the telegram in his fist.

'Plainly this pair are enemy agents and anything they say cannot be trusted. They may be set on claiming the afterlife for whatever foreign power they represent. Well, their plans have been thwarted by our vigilance. Good work, Sergeant.

Your part in this shall be noted.'

`Thank you, sit If you have no objections, I will go and begin setting your orders in motion' Vollmer received a cursory nod from the general and withdrew. Once outside the tent he turned to the two sentries standing guard. `Where are Johnson and Hawthorne?'

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal:

The Doctor and I spent several hours examining the findings generated by the TARDIS during the dive. The force-field generator had been successful in allowing the Doctor and Doulton to slip inside the rift

without disrupting the dimensional buffer, despite the artron energy spike at the moment of entry. But the general had been pulled through the rift alone, his egress rupturing the delicate membrane. The Doctor was dismayed by the results.

It's as if a cut just starting to heal had been torn apart from the inside out. Whatever lies on the other side is seeping through the wound, infecting this world. And the infection is spreading'

The Doctor rubbed his eyes, weariness evident in his features.

'That settles it. Nobody else can be allowed to pass through the conjunction until we know more about it. At first light I will try to convince Doultton further dives are too dangerous. Hopefully he will listen, but the military mind can be a dense and obstinate thing'

My curiosity got the better of me and I asked what it had been like beyond the rift.

'Blazing light and utter disorientation,' the Doctor replied.

'I can understand why minds unused to temporal and spatial displacement might interpret the experience as akin to a journey beyond death. The effect is most perturbing.

'No, I meant... on the Other Side'

'Did I meet any dear departed? Is that what you're asking me? Yes, in a way, I suppose I did' The Doctor took my hand and led me deep into the TARDIS interior. As we walked he related his experiences in the rose garden, recalling the sights and smells, the strange words spoken by Adric. By the time he had finished, we were standing in a large circular room I had never seen before. The walls were panelled with walnut, reaching high above us before curving inwards to a single point over the centre of the chamber.

'This is a place of remembrance; the Doctor said quietly. A tall circular case of glass and wood stood in the centre of the chamber. In it were several shelves, each with a variety of objects resting on them. He invited me to have a closer look at the cabinet and its contents. Inside I could see a collection of oddities, such as a book entitled *The French Revolution*, a scrap of tartan cloth and a badge emblazoned with the letters SSS. I did not recognise most of the items. But the last artefact stopped me short, partly from the shock of seeing it again and because it was so familiar. Roughly assembled on a black cloth were the fragments of Adric's broken star-shaped badge.

All of these - are they souvenirs?' I asked.

'Mementoes would be a more appropriate choice of word,' he replied. 'Those who travel with me are here for such a short time in the context of my lives. I choose to remember them all here.'

Nyssa looked again at the contents of the cabinet. 'What about Tegan? You haven't got anything here to represent Tegan.'

'Not yet' The Doctor walked around the cabinet to stand beside her. 'As a Time Lord I will live for hundreds, even thousands of years. The time my companions spend travelling with me is all too brief. But that doesn't make their lives, their achievements any less valuable or important to me. One day you will leave me Nyssa, just as all the others have done. And when you do, I want to remember you. I can't imagine anything more terrifying than forgetting all I have experienced and felt, all the friends I have known and the lives that have touched mine. So I keep this as a place of remembrance'

I understand his reasons for keeping such a place and told him so. I still could not help wondering what relevance it had to what he witnessed on the other side of the rift.

'When I regained awareness in that place, I wanted to believe what I was experiencing was real. The urge to give in to that reality was so strong, so powerful - but something rang false. It all felt like an extrapolation of my own thoughts and memories, just another remembrance' He pointed at the objects within the cabinet. 'It was like being inside that case, trapped. And the more I questioned the reality, the less real it became'

Another question occurred to me. How long before James reached Corra Linn?

The Doctor grimaced at this. 'What makes you think he isn't already here?'

* * *

Dr Kirkhope put another lump of coal on the fire before collapsing back into his armchair, drawing the well-worn shawl closer round his shoulders. The winter had been mild by Scottish standards, but the old physician felt the chill so much more these days, the cold seeping into his bones. No matter how many layers of clothing he put on, they never seemed enough to get warm extremities nor drive the dread from his mind. Ever since word had spread about the soldiers arriving

at Corra Linn, Kirkhope had been haunted by the memory of what he had done.

Banishing that boy to the Lock had seemed the only solution at the time. The shock of hearing Morag's voice accuse him of murder and worse had unhinged his reason, or so he told himself. He panicked and in his panic sent the boy away as an act of self defence. So it had ruined one life, but Kirkhope had saved so many in his decades of service to the people of New Lanark. Did not the greater good compensate for this one sin?

The doctor knew he was not alone in bearing this grief. James's father had moved away, taking his two remaining sons with him.

The last anybody heard was that the trio had moved to New Zealand in search of a better life among the Scottish immigrants settling in the South Island. Of the Lees family only Martha remained in the cotton milling community, but she had become a pariah. Gossip spread among the other women about her ruthlessness while the men considered her soiled goods. She had continued working in the mills until an accident robbed her right arm of strength. Fortunately for Martha, she had some meagre savings and was able to get by.

But like the doctor, she had a haunted look.

Kirkhope had seen James only once, several years later, since sending the boy away to the Lock. The physician was certain he had spotted the lad lurking on the fringes of the village, older and taller but with the same, unmistakable features and penetrating eyes. Kirkhope followed the young man up the narrow, winding trail to Corra Linn. He saw James dive into the water. For long minutes the boy did not reappear. Finally, when the doctor was convinced James must have drowned in the flooded valley, a body floated to the surface of the water. Kirkhope used a branch to snag the figure and drag it to shore. James was alive, just. Despite being so close to death, he still spoke with the voices of the deceased. Whatever cure was being administered in Glasgow, it had not yet been effective. After nursing the boy back to health the physician returned James to the Lock. It had seemed the only safe option.

When he first read about a psychic boy astounding the crowned heads of Europe with his powers as a medium, Kirkhope did not connect the story with James Lees. How could anyone get from the grimmest institution in Glasgow to the royal courts of a dozen different countries? But when he saw a cartoon in *The Times* about a séance

held for the Crown Princess of Prussia, there was no mistaking the face of the medium. A letter to the administrator of the Lock confirmed that James Lees had been cured and made the ward of a German Baroness. Kirkhope suspected the exchange of money had been the cause of this sudden cure but had no proof for such an allegation.

So now he waited, his thoughts dreading the prospect of a return visit from that creature. As a man of science and learning, Kirkhope did not let himself believe in notions like demonic possession. But the cursed nature of James's ability sorely tested that honest reasoning. The physician could not explain how he knew, but he had felt the presence of the young man drawing ever closer these last few days. All the fires in the world could not keep the chill from Kirkhope's heart now.

The knock at the door was so soft he almost missed hearing it. After a few seconds the knock was repeated and the physician called out, demanding to know who was coming to his door at this hour of the night. 'I'm sorry, sir, but I need your help,' a young woman's voice replied from outside. 'I couldn't come to see you in daylight. Kirkhope threw the shawl aside, almost relieved at the prospect of the ordeal that lay ahead.

Dealing with this woman's distress and guilt would distract him for a while.

The doctor rose and went to the entrance of his humble lodgings, pulling back the bolt and sweeping open the door. 'Well, you'd better come inside. We can't have you -'

James Lees was standing on the step, his arms clasped Around his chest in a hug. He smiled at the elderly physician's shocked face before speaking, his lips moving but the voice that of a frightened young woman. 'Thank you, Doctor. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't been here.' James stepped inside, closing the door behind himself.

Chapter Six

February 19, 1863

The old man is cowering on the cold stone floor. Please don't hurt me, he

begs. *I thought what I was doing was right.*

You frightened me, you frightened all of us. Please, I don't want to die. The fury reaches down, fingers ablaze, light streaming backwards in two arcs, almost like the wings of a bird. No, not like a bird - like an angel. The creature holds the old man's face in its grasp, talons of light plunging into flesh. Choking sounds and feet thumping against the floor.

Dead flesh sloughed from old bones. Sins and hopes, eaten like carrion. Deeper and deeper, back and back, the past becoming the present and then the future. No memories any more, just blackness in the light, death in place of life, all torn asunder. Then the angel turns to you and smiles, but its teeth are like fangs and the hand reaches for you and you hear yourself begging, pleading, just as the old man did. You're going to die in this place and there is -

Nyssa opened her eyes and gasped in air. She was in her room in the TARDIS, she was safe. It had been another nightmare, another murder witnessed. But was it from the past, the present or the future? She had to find the Doctor and see what light he could shed on it. After dressing she hurried to the control room, leaving her journal behind in her haste. The Doctor was by the TARDIS doors, which stood slightly ajar. He motioned Nyssa to silence.

She could hear voices from outside, two men whispering. 'I'm telling you, Thorny, something's up! Half the men have been sent upstream with Clark. Most of the others are marching to New Lanark with orders to evacuate the place. And now this - it ain't right,' Johnson hissed, his words punctuated with the sound of metal clinking together. 'I ain't putting no woman in shackles. If Doulton wants to see her and the Doctor chained, he can do it himself! I didn't join the army to turn women into prisoners.

'A statement that does you credit,' the Doctor interjected as he stepped from the TARDIS. The startled soldiers scrambled to their feet, cursing at being caught unawares.

'You surprised us!' Johnson stammered.

The Doctor smiled as Nyssa emerged from the blue box. 'I understand there is much afoot this morning. Perhaps you gentlemen would be kind enough to deliver us to General Doulton. We have to speak with him as a matter of urgency.'

Hawthorne stepped aside and pointed down to the river below.

'He is waiting for both of you down by the water's edge, Doctor

- this way.'

The Doctor smiled insincerely. 'You're too kind. Nyssa?'

She joined him and they walked down the steep hillside together, followed by the two guards. Both soldiers were carrying heavy chains and manacles. 'Doctor, I had another one of these dreams last night,' Nyssa whispered.

'I rather thought you might. An angelic creature torturing and killing an old man?'

'Yes! How did you -'

'I had the same vision. Probably a side effect of the rift widening, accentuating the psychic capacity of those nearby with latent abilities. I think I know who our angel is:

'James?'

The Doctor nodded. 'He was probably responsible for the deaths of those officers.'

'How did he get here before us?'

'How indeed? And why has he become a murderer?'

'Don't you mean the creature from beyond the rift that possesses him?' Nyssa asked. 'Surely that is the killer, not James.'

'I'm not so certain of that any more...'

Nyssa wanted to ask him more but they had reached the bottom of the slope. A less than gentle nudge from Hawthorne's rifle butt propelled the Doctor towards the general, who was standing out on the pontoon. Doulton was surveying the river, hands resting on his hips, his head tilted to one side, listening intently. 'Do you hear that, Doctor?'

'The water flowing by or the dull thud of someone making a terrible mistake?'

'Neither. If anyone has made a terrible mistake here, it is you' The general turned to regard his captives. 'I

thought I ordered this man and his accomplice to be shackled?'

'Well, you can't always get what you want,' the Doctor said, a benign smile playing across his lips. 'Who said that first, I wonder?'

'You, sir, are a traitor and an impostor!' the general shouted.

'I'm not certain I can be both at the same time'

'You told me you were sent by Scotland Yard. But that distinguished establishment denies all knowledge of you and your accomplice'

'No, you asked if I had been sent by Scotland Yard. "You could say that", was my reply. I never claimed to be anything I am not, so it is less than accurate to call me an impostor. As for being a traitor - whom I am supposed to have betrayed?'

'Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, ruler of the British Empire!' Doulton retorted. 'Her private secretary, Sir Henry Ponsonby, sent me a telegram demanding you be arrested, tried and - if I deemed it necessary - summarily executed'

'Could I see this telegram? Call me old fashioned, but I would like to check the exact wording. We wouldn't want you taking any unnecessary or precipitous action without the proper authorisation, would we, Nyssa?'

'No, that would be -'

'Silence!' the general snarled. 'You are in no position to request anything. I believe you to be agents provocateurs of some foreign power, intent on destabilising the British Empire by attempting to assassinate Her Majesty when she visits this site.'

You would claim what lies beyond the portal for your own country - but you shall not be successful!

The Doctor ignored this last assertion. 'The Queen is coming here - why?'

'So she may see this gateway to the afterlife for herself. If she wishes, I will personally escort her through to the Other Side where she may be reunited with her late husband, the Royal Consort, Prince Albert'

Nyssa almost laughed. 'You're not expecting her to go underwater in one of those diving suits, are you?'

'There will be no need for such devices by the time Her Majesty

arrives' Doulton outlined his plans to drain the flooded valley while damming the Clyde further upriver. 'Within a day or two she will be able to walk into the afterlife'

'This is madness,' the Doctor countered. 'You and I have travelled through the rift and we both know it is not the gateway to some paradise of eternal life. Have a care, General. I heard you screaming in terror and pain on the other side of that portal.'

'Nonsense! I have never let pain or terror be my master.'

'Please, think again before you bring Her Majesty to this place.'

'Your pleadings come too late. I have already sent a telegram to Windsor Castle. It should reach Her Majesty shortly.'

The Doctor was not giving in yet. 'There is a murderer loose here. He has already claimed the lives of two officers and, I believe, a civilian was slain last night by that same hand.'

Would you risk Her Majesty's life in such circumstances?'

'How can you know all this unless you are the murderer?' Doulton demanded.

'He saw it in a vision,' Nyssa replied, 'and so did I'

'Ahh, yes, the Lady Nyssa. Strange that one with such an aristocratic bearing and countenance should go unrecorded in every record of the peerage. Strange also that Scotland Yard could find no mention of any place or dwelling known as Traken within the Empire. Can you explain that riddle to me?'

'Where I come from is not important -' Nyssa began.

'Quite right. It is where you end up that most concerns me,' the general spat back. 'I have never ordered the execution of a woman but you shall become the first, unless the Doctor can offer some mitigating reasons why I should spare your life'

'Whatever you think of me, you cannot perceive Nyssa as a credible threat to you or your mission,' the Doctor said quietly.

'Show her some mercy.'

Doulton stepped so close to the Doctor that their noses were almost touching. 'There is no mercy in war, Doctor, you would do well to

remember that. In the meantime I will let you live, until further proof of your crimes has been unearthed. But you shall both be shackled and remain so until I decide otherwise. Is that quite clear?'

'Perfectly so. Tell me one thing, General - have you been suffering any headaches since you returned from the dive yesterday? Dizziness, perhaps shortness of breath?'

'Don't try to be concerned for my health, Doctor. It doesn't suit your bland face.'

It's just that I notice you have a tiny bubble in the aqueous humour of your eye. Some two hundred years ago an English physicist called Robert Boyle noticed a similar symptom in the eye of a viper that had been compressed and decompressed.

It was the first recorded observation of an illness known as the bends.'

'There is nothing wrong with me!' the general bellowed, veins bulging in his neck and temples. Nyssa thought he was going to strike the Doctor. Instead Doulton snapped his fingers, summoning forward the two soldiers. 'Remove these two enemies of the Empire and shackle them. Make sure the chains are good and tight - such as these deserve no comfort, nor any sympathy. Dismissed!'

Vollmer was glad to be away from Corra Linn. Word of the dead officer, had spread quickly through the ranks of the new troops, casting a pall over the encampment. General Doulton's behaviour had also been troubling, more aggressive and less willing to listen. The sergeant had been proud to serve under the general in the Crimea, but Doulton had been a different man since injury forced him away from the battlefield.

The man seemed to be spoiling for a fight, all too eager to prove himself still the warrior he once was. That could only lead to trouble, especially with no other officers around to contradict him, nor offer alternate counsel.

But most of all Vollmer was glad to get away from the flooded river valley, with its steep hills and oppressive atmosphere.

Since arriving he had felt as though his every move was being watched, as if someone was peering over his shoulder.

When Doulton had asked him to detail men from the lower ranks to evacuate New Lanark, Vollmer had taken the job for himself, even

though only half a dozen troopers could be spared for the task. Another half dozen had been sent to Lanark to collect yet another piece of diving equipment. Why this was necessary when most of the troops were busy lowering the water level at Corra Linn escaped the sergeant's reasoning. But the general was determined to go back through this gateway today, taking at least a dozen men with him.

So Vollmer was left with six men and a village of more than a thousand people to evacuate in just a few hours. Doulton gave him a signed letter from Her Majesty requesting that any and all assistance be given to whomsoever bore the missive. The sergeant had taken that directly to the Walker brothers, who owned the cotton mills. They had grumbled about lost productivity but eventually agreed to evacuate the community for two days while water was temporarily emptied from above the dam. Their mood had improved when Vollmer offered to seek compensation for any losses and made assurances armed troops would protect all the property left behind - particularly the antiques the Walkers had in their home.

Once the announcement had been made to the workers, the evacuation began in a surprisingly orderly fashion. By midday most of the workforce and their families were making their way up the hill away from New Lanark, taking just a few clothes and belongings with them. Vollmer was happy for the Walker brothers to take charge of finding billets for their workers until the emergency was over. Once the evacuation was under way the sergeant initiated a room by room search of the empty village to ensure nobody was left behind. When he saw the simple lodgings occupied by most of the workers, he realised why there had been so few protests at leaving their belongings behind - they didn't have much worth stealing beyond clothing and the few possessions they were carrying.

He knocked on the entrance to a single room dwelling but got no response. Vollmer was about to move on when he noticed a curious odour seeping from inside - sweet and sickly, like toffee burning over a fire. He crouched on the floor and pressed his head against the flagstone so he could peer beneath the wooden door, its underside chewed away by vermin years ago. The sergeant could not be sure but he thought there was a woman's hand splayed out on the floor inside. He called out to her several times but got no response.

Deciding there was nothing else for it, Vollmer kicked at the door with his heavy boots, the old wood splintering inwards with little persuasion.

The woman was dead, of that he was certain after a glance.

Her glazed eyes, the trickle of blood from her nostrils, the gritted teeth and the way her lips were drawn back from the gums spoke volumes in the empty silence. Most telling was her hair, whiter than any snowfall and a mute testament that whatever ended her life had already been visited upon Lieutenants Ashe and Kempshall. But why this woman and only this woman among a community of more than a thousand people? Vollmer looked about the room but its contents offered few clues to the identity of the dead woman - no personal papers, no family portraits. She wore a wedding ring but the clothes in the dresser did not indicate a husband or children. It was a mystery, but only that much was certain. The sergeant was leaving when he heard a shout from outside. Vollmer opened the single window to see a soldier looking up at him with frightened eyes. 'What is it, Lennox?'

'You'd better see for yourself, Sergeant,' the private replied, his features pale and haggard. 'I think it's the local doctor. Place is strewn with broken bottles of potions and medical equipment.'

He's dead, just like we found the lieutenant: Another one, Vollmer thought to himself. Why now, and why these people? He told Lennox to go back to the doctor's house and wait for him there. The sergeant took one last look around the woman's dwelling. So much about this didn't make sense. He knew there was probably a clue here but he was no detective. Vollmer decided to see whether Lennox was right about this other corpse. He pulled the broken door closed, not seeing the carefully stitched sampler hanging on the back of the oak: BLESS THIS HOUSE O LORD read the message, with a name modestly stitched inside a floral border

- Martha Lees.

'But Your Majesty -' Ponsonby protested, following his Queen along the corridors of Windsor Castle.

'Our decision is final, Sir Henry,' Victoria replied, cutting him short. 'Time and again we had listened to your doubts and denunciations but General Doulton has found proof. And still you persist in contradicting and second guessing us!'

'Your Majesty, I only wish to ensure your safety.'

The Queen turned on her private secretary. 'You would see us wrapped in a thousand sheets of calico and locked away from the world, unable to make our own decisions nor choose our own destiny'

'Please forgive me, ma'am, but I must -'

'Have you ever stopped to think about what we want, what is best for us? We have suffered the loss of a husband as well as a consort, the father of our nine children. We shall be alone until the grave, without his good judgement and counsel to guide us. Now, at last, when we have the possibility of being reunited with our beloved Albert, you would deny us! It shall not be borne! We will accept the general's gracious invitation and travel north into Scotland! We will do so accompanied only by our most faithful and loyal servants - you shall not be one of them, Sir Henry. Good day to you!'

'Two civilian casualties you say?' Doulton marched back and forth impatiently by the riverbank while his men removed the lid from a massive wooden crate. Getting the huge object there from Lanark had taken all morning, a task not made any easier by travelling against the flow of a thousand people and their possessions evacuating the cotton-mill community downstream. In the meantime Vollmer had completed his search and was reporting back on the corpses found after the evacuation.

'Yes, sir. A man and a woman. He was apparently the local physician, Dr Robert Kirkhope. About fifty to sixty years old. Both had the same terrified expression and snow-white hair that we found on the lieutenants. The woman's identity isn't known, but it seems likely she was a worker at the mills.'

'Very well. What progress at the dam downstream?'

'I have authorised the men to begin opening the floodgates now the evacuation is complete. The Walker brothers said it would take fully twenty-four hours to empty this valley if no further water was flowing into it,' the sergeant said.

'Good, then everything is proceeding to schedule,' Doulton replied. The ground beneath their feet shook for a second, followed moments later by an almighty rumbling boom that echoed down the valley. A flock of startled birds flew away into the air. 'And it sounds as though Clark and his men have begun their blasting upstream. The new dam should be in place before nightfall. Excellent!' The general noticed the men had stopped unbolting the sides of the crate.

'Nobody said you could cease working! Get back to your duties this instant. I want that diving bell ready for use within the hour, do you hear me?' The soldiers saluted and returned to their task.

Will there be anything else, general?' Vollmer asked. 'Yes, go and check on the prisoners.'

'Prisoners?'

I've had the Doctor and Nyssa put in shackles. They as much as admitted being responsible for murdering those two poor souls you discovered in the village. I suspect they may also have had a hand in the killing of Lieutenants Ashe and Kempshall.'

The sergeant was perplexed by this last assertion. 'But both officers died before you arrived here with the Doctor and Lady Nyssa. You accompanied the civilians on the journey from Windsor. How could they be responsible for Ashe and Kempshall's deaths?'

'Are you questioning my judgement, Sergeant?' Doulton demanded.

'No, sir, of course not. But I don't think -'

'The army is not paying you to think, Sergeant. If the army wanted men who could think it would deploy philosophers instead of infantry on the battlefield. Have you seen any philosophers going to war, Sergeant?'

'No sir.' Vollmer felt embarrassed at being browbeaten in front of the lower ranks. He would never dream of subjecting his own troops to such a humiliation.

'No sir,' Doulton replied, mimicking the sergeant's East End accent. 'Now be about your business before I have you put on charges of insubordination and questioning the orders of a superior officer!'

Vollmer snapped to attention, saluted crisply and then marched away. The sooner he got away from bloody General Doulton, the better.

William Clark was enjoying himself. His father and three elder brothers had established a lucrative demolition business a decade ago. Old single-storey buildings were being torn down and replaced with new, taller structures across the north of England to create room for new machines and new methods of production in mills and factories. Clark had grown up amongst brick dust and rubble. While other boys played with toys, William was learning how to cut a fuse to the right length for any situation and how best to frame a detonation so the debris went precisely where you wanted.

But being the youngest of four sons meant he would never be more

than a junior partner in the family business, forever under the thumbs of his siblings. Clark had enlisted in the army, hopeful his experience with explosives might win him better opportunities and perhaps promotion. But the Crimean War was long since concluded and there seemed little call for his expertise - until now. He had spent the morning assessing the best way of creating a temporary dam above Corra Linn. To plug the valley permanently would require a massive workforce, not to mention the flooding problems it would create further upriver. But the general had only asked for a stopgap, something that would halt the flow of water long enough to gain better access to the portal below the falls.

Once that was found, a tunnel would be dug down to it and this dam could be abandoned.

After much consideration, Clark decided the simplest approach was to set the explosives at the top of the steep rock face overlooking the river from the north. There was a fissure within the sandstone that ran deep into the ground. Crack that apart and half the hillside would tumble down into the narrow gorge, blocking the water's progress in less than a minute.

How long the landslide of rocks and trees and earth could resist the river's insistent waters was another matter.

When it came, the explosion was louder than anything Clark had heard in his life, still ringing in his ears long after the dust had settled. Afterwards, the lance corporal ventured forward to see the results of his work. He soon smiled with satisfaction.

Half the northern slope had displaced itself into the valley, neatly cutting off the flow. Already the gorge downstream from the new dam was beginning to run dry, starved of its water supply. Now the hard work began. Clark shouted at his men to emerge from safety.

'We need to shore up the dam. I want four two-man teams cutting down trees. Choose the ones nearest the edge so we can roll them down into the gorge. The rest of you, start gathering rocks and stones to build up the top of the dam. Nothing smaller than your head. Everybody understand what you have to do?

Good. Then move!'

The afternoon hours had hung heavy, punctuated by the rantings of Doultton at his men and further, occasional explosions from upstream. The general was becoming increasingly frustrated by delays in

preparing the diving bell for use, screaming abuse at the men attaching guide ropes and linking air hoses from the bellows box. Vollmer had been careful to keep out of Doulton's way, not wishing to catch another torrent of abuse from the sharp edge of the general's tongue.

Instead he took over responsibility for guarding the Doctor and Nyssa, sending Johnson and Hawthorne to the water's edge in his place.

The prisoners were sat back to back in front of their blue box, wrists and ankles manacled together, chains linking the metal restraints. Despite being under suspicion for several mysterious deaths, the duo appeared unconcerned by their situation. 'It's Doulton you should be guarding, Sergeant, not us,' the Doctor said. 'He's becoming increasingly irrational, refusing to listen to reason. He's a danger to himself but worse than that, he's a danger to everyone else around him'

'The general is one of the finest officers I have ever had the privilege to serve under,' Vollmer replied, not wishing to get drawn into this conversation.

'He may well have been - in the past. But not any more'

'Listen to him,' Nyssa said. Doulton's latest tirade drifted up to the encampment. 'Is he normally like that?'

'He seemed quite a pleasant fellow at Windsor,' the Doctor added. 'But since we arrived here... There's a medical condition called decompression sickness, also known as the bends. It's been identified among workers who spend long hours doing construction work under water inside caissons like that diving bell'

'Laying foundations for bridges?'

'Exactly. It's a disorder of the body, characterised by severe pain, cramp and difficulty in breathing. It can also unbalance the mind, changing the way a person acts and impairing their judgement' The Doctor peered at Vollmer. 'Have you seen the general exhibit any of those symptoms?'

No, I don't think so'

'But he has been acting out of character lately - would you agree with that?'

`Perhaps'

`How long before he goes too far?' Nyssa asked. 'How long before somebody has to relieve him of his command?'

`You're talking about mutiny!' The sergeant shook his head. 'I know what you're trying to do. You want to dupe me, use me to protect you from the general. Well, it won't work. General Doulton is a good man. Perhaps he doesn't always make the right decisions, but who does? I won't become a party to your plotting and schemes!' Vollmer walked away from the prisoners, taking himself far enough away so he could still see them but did not have to listen to their sedition. The sergeant was still keeping watch over the pair when Clark and the others returned from their work upriver.

`How did it go?' Vollmer asked.

`Not bad. The temporary dam should hold back the river for three or four days. After that the water will either flood over the top or the pressure will break the dam. When it does I wouldn't want to be in its way.' The lance corporal paused, his attention caught by a shouting voice in the distance. 'Who is that screaming?'

`Doulton. He can't get the diving bell working properly. You'd better get down there, he'll need at least another dozen men to lift that thing into the water.' Clark gave Vollmer a friendly salute before leading his men down the hillside to the pontoon.

It was almost dusk when the diving bell was put into the water.

Doulton began stripping off the inessential parts of his uniform. 'Lance Corporal, go to the camp and bring down the prisoners. Have Sergeant Vollmer return with you.' Clark ran up the hillside to fetch the guard and his prisoners. It took some time to get the two captives down the slope, their movements restricted by the manacles and chains.

Nyssa was surprised to see the diving bell half-submerged in the water. Despite the name, it was a cube of cast iron that reminded her of a contraption she had travelled in at Heathrow Airport with Tegan. What had it been called? A lift. Yes, the diving bell looked like a lift - but one without doors. 'How do you get inside it?' she asked.

`There is no floor,' the Doctor said. 'As the bell is lowered, air is trapped inside by the water pressing up into the cavity from underneath. The greater the depth, the stronger the water pressure becomes. To compensate, more air is pumped in through the top,

balancing out the pressure inside.'

'But how will the soldiers get from inside the diving bell to the rift and back?'

'By swimming,' the general replied, approaching the two prisoners. 'I hope you can swim, young lady, since you are coming with us.' Doulton loomed over Nyssa but she refused to be intimidated.

'Why?'

I want you with me as a guarantee when we enter the portal.

That way the Doctor will not be tempted to escape while we are on the Other Side.'

The Doctor was still trying to get through to Doulton. 'You know as well as I do the rift is extremely dangerous and unstable. Sending one person through is foolhardy. Taking a dozen people through could be cataclysmic!'

Doulton lashed out with a clenched fist, striking the Doctor across the face with such force it sent him sprawling. The general demanded Vollmer hand him a rifle. After checking it was loaded, Doulton aimed the weapon at the Doctor's head. 'One more word from you and I will take pleasure in bringing forward your execution. Do I make myself clear?' The Doctor just nodded, his eyes ablaze with anger. Satisfied, the general gave the rifle back to Vollmer. 'Sergeant, I want the Doctor gagged - that should still his tongue in my absence.

Then remove the shackles from the female prisoner and place her inside the diving bell. Clark, choose ten of your best men and move them inside the diving bell, ready for the off. The rest will be here maintaining the air supply, controlling the speed the diving bell descends, and pulling it back up when I give the signal. Is that clear?'

Vollmer fashioned a gag from his handkerchief and began tying it around the Doctor's neck. But the prisoner still managed to shout a few words before being silenced. 'Nyssa, whatever you see beyond the rift, don't believe it! The -'

The general strode into the water, followed by Clark and ten soldiers. Vollmer followed them, leading Nyssa to the diving bell. The sergeant saluted Doulton before standing aside to let the troops enter the cube, the general taking Nyssa with him. Within a minute the bell was disappearing under the surface, just the air hose and guide ropes

betraying its presence.

My Darling Child,

I have so much for which to thank you. The past months have lingered long in my heart, ever since work began on the beloved Mausoleum. I go daily to that place while at Windsor, and long to be there with your precious Papa. But the letters you sent about Master James Lees and his remarkable gift gave me hope that, perhaps, I might be reunited with dear Papa in this life. The young man came to Windsor and gave a séance.

To hear Papa's voice speaking, it was like he was standing beside me, his hand resting on my shoulder.

Please excuse me if my own hand shakes in writing this. I am travelling north into Scotland by train and the carriage is most violent in its movement. By the time you read these words I will be visiting the place that Master Lees spoke of a gateway to the spirit world. As you can imagine, Sir Henry objected most strongly to my journey and insisted I be accompanied by a small contingent of household guards. He wants only for my safety but he does not understand what it is to lose the one you love so soon in life, to be so utterly bereft.

I remember that dreadful, dreadful day last December, when I began my second year alone. We all went into your Papa's dear room and Dr Stanley most kindly held a service for us, with prayers and benediction. The room was full of flowers and sunshine, so glorious for a winter's day, so comforting. I said it seemed like a birthday, and Dr Stanley answered, 'It is a birthday in a new world.'

Now I journey to see that new world for myself. I know not whether I shall return. Finding and losing my Beloved again may be more than I can bear, so I may choose to stay with him there. I know you would understand, my dearest daughter. Whatever may come to pass, please destroy this missive after you have read it. I travel in secret and none must know of this most precious journey. I hope and pray for what our tomorrows may bring,

Ever devoted Mama V.R.

Having lived in London for much of his life, Vollmer was used to the glow of gas lamps illuminating the night. Even in a peasouper there was always a hint of light to find your way home across the cobbles. But beside Corra Linn night fell like a shroud. There were a few pinpricks of light in the sky but they seemed distant and lonelier here.

The sergeant smiled to himself.

Clara loved looking up at the stars. Just after they were married he once took her across the river to Greenwich for a picnic.

They had climbed the hill to Blackheath and laid out on the grass, watching as the stars winked into existence overhead, the sky bleeding blue into black. What is she doing right now, Vollmer wondered. Is she sitting in the front room by the fire, thinking of me? The sergeant was surrounded by his men, but still felt lonely.

Perhaps it was time to surrender his uniform and go back to civilian life. He had seen enough death and misery to last him a lifetime. Perhaps it was time to go home. They could try again for a baby. Maybe it wasn't too late...

`Sergeant, you'd better come and have a look at this.'

Johnson's voice intruded upon Vollmer's musings. He stood and walked on to the pontoon. Lanterns had been hung about the wooden platform to provide light for the men keeping the fly-wheels on the bellows box turning. A dozen troopers had been working in shifts for several hours. The sergeant peered into the water where Johnson had been pointing. Since the diving bell had descended into the Clyde the river's surface had lowered by at least a yard, but there was little else of note visible to Vollmer.

`Well? I don't see anything.

`Exactly. No bubbles, no movement, nothing. It's been like that for hours.' Johnson made little effort to stifle a yawn. `The lads are exhausted. For all we know there's nobody left inside the diving bell - why bother keeping the air pump going?'

`Precisely because we don't know. Unless you want to get into a diving suit and go down to check for yourself?'

The young private shook his head. 'Could we at least give these men a rest? I don't know how much longer they can last.'

Vollmer could see the wisdom of that. 'I'll go to camp and send down replacements. It will give me a chance to check on the prisoner.'

`Doctor,' a voice whispered. 'Can you hear me?' The Doctor opened his eyes to find James Lees crouching beside him in the small tent. The young man's lips were moving but he spoke with Adric's voice. 'Are

you all right? What has happened?'

'Too much to explain now,' the Doctor replied after pulling his gag aside. 'Please James, try to speak in your normal voice. Hearing Adric's words coming from your mouth is most... disconcerting'

'Sorry, I didn't realise' When James spoke again it was with his own voice. 'Is that better?'

'Considerably. How long have you been here?'

'I only just arrived. It's taken me days to travel north from Windsor - why?'

The Doctor peered intently into the young man's face.

'There have been several mysterious deaths. I was beginning to wonder if...'

'If I was responsible?'

'Yes.' The Doctor pushed the harsh metal edges of the manacles up his arms and rubbed at angry red marks where skin was rubbed raw 'The quality of these primitive handcuffs leaves something to be desired.'

'Has anyone been through the gateway yet?' James asked urgently.

'Yes. A lieutenant from the Royal Navy, but he died soon afterwards. Douulton and I went through yesterday in diving suits.

The general is back down there now, having gone down in a diving bell along with eleven of his soldiers -and Nyssa.'

'I have to get back to the Other Side. Where are the diving suits?'

'Near the water's edge.' The Doctor grabbed the young man's shoulder. 'Listen to me, James - I've seen what's beyond that gateway. It isn't real, any of it.'

'But I saw my grandfather, he was there to welcome me'

'You saw what you wanted to see, but that doesn't make it the truth'

'You're wrong, Doctor. I belong there. It's my home - can't you understand that?'

'Hendry! Cooper! Get your lazy arses out of bed and get dressed!'

Vollmer's voice could be heard from nearby, urging his men into action. James peered out of the tent.

'A soldier - he's coming this way.'

'You'd better go,' the Doctor advised. 'He'll want to see I'm still here' James began to leave. 'Please, James, remember what I said,' the Doctor urged. 'Don't try to go back down to the rift. These soldiers are nervous enough as it is, they don't need much excuse to shoot first and ask questions later.' The young man slipped out of the tent, scuttling away into the darkness.

Soon afterwards Vollmer entered, putting his rifle to one side while he checked the Doctor's chains and manacles were still secure.

'Where is Nyssa?' the Doctor asked. 'Has she come back yet?'

'No, the diving bell is still at the bottom of the river. I just came to make sure you were not being ill-treated. Is there anything you need?'

'No, but thank you for asking.'

'You may be under suspicion for murder, but that doesn't mean you have to be treated worse than any other prisoner.'

'Sergeant, you must listen to me. I know you have been trained all your life to follow orders, to respect authority -and that is admirable. But where does loyalty stop and common sense begin? We may be under suspicion but nothing has been proved about us. Ask yourself, why will Doulton not listen to reason? Is that the man you have known and respected for so long? Is this why you joined the army - to serve a man growing increasingly erratic and irrational? When do you stand up and say no, Sergeant?'

'Enough!' Vollmer began to leave, but stopped long enough to snarl a reply. 'I don't need to be lectured by you, Doctor.'

'I can make my own judgements.' A shout in the distance caught the sergeant's attention.

'It's coming up! The diving bell is coming up!'

'Sergeant, please, take me with you,' the Doctor urged. 'I

want to make sure Nyssa returns unharmed. At least grant me that peace of mind.' The footfalls of several soldiers raced past on their

way down to the water's edge.

`Granted. But try to escape and I'll shoot you myself,' Vollmer promised.

It was midnight when the diving bell was hauled back to the surface. Retrieving the cumbersome cube and its living cargo required the remaining strength of all the soldiers on dry land.

The decreasing water level made their task harder, as the bell scraped along the side of the riverbank as it rose. Vol mer shouted and exhorted his men to greater efforts, watched by the Doctor. Eventually a corner broke the surface, prompting a weak cheer from the men pulling the guide ropes. One soldier swam out from under the diving bell and scrambled out of the river, followed by another and then another.

The general was last to emerge, standing up wearily in waist-deep water, smiling proudly. 'We did it!' he shouted, getting another cheer from his men. He strode to the water's edge and threw himself to the ground beside his fellow submariners.

Vollmer counted the men. All ten privates were present, along with Doulton and Clark. The sergeant shook the general's hand, congratulating him on getting all the men back safe and sound from such a perilous endeavour.

`Where's Nyssa?' Vollmer swivelled round to see the Doctor shuffling towards them, his movements restricted by chains and manacles. 'Where is she?'

Doulton stood up, his uniform still dripping wet, his chin held high. 'We had to leave her behind,' the general said firmly.

'Beyond the rift, as you call it.'

'Why?'

The general shifted uncomfortably. 'When the time came to return she was nowhere to be found. I thought she had already left. Perhaps she tried to swim back to the surface, in which case she has probably drowned. Or she may still be on the Other Side.'

`Please,' the Doctor pleaded, let me take a diving suit and search for her.'

`No,' Doulton said flatly.

`I would be willing to accompany the prisoner,' Vollmer added.

`You are becoming far too familiar with this prisoner, Sergeant. I notice the Doctor is not gagged as I requested before departing'

The sergeant blushed with embarrassment. I -'

`Quite frankly I couldn't care less about your explanation or what has happened to the Doctor's accomplice,' Doulton said. 'The life or death of such a worthless whelp is of no interest to me. My priority is preparing the gateway for Her Majesty's arrival. We shall go back down tomorrow at dawn.

All those who have yet to see the wonders of the Other Side shall report here by first light, when I shall handpick the next group to accompany me. Is that quite clear?'

`Yes, sir!' the soldiers shouted back in unison.

The general smiled. 'Capital. Then I shall retire for the night.

It has been a long day and we have much to do in the morning' He started up the hill to camp, but paused to throw one last comment at Vollmer. 'Sergeant, since you seem so eager to help, you can stand guard tonight alone. That will give the others a chance to rest'

`What was it like?' Johnson asked, his voice a low whisper in the darkness. 'Thorny?'

`Go to sleep, Nicholas. We've a long day ahead of us and I'm tired,' the other soldier replied wearily. 'You'll see for yourself in the morning'

`Did you see anyone you know on the Other Side?'

Hawthorne rolled over to face Johnson. 'Nicholas, I'm sorry but the general ordered us not to talk about what happened there'

`Since when did you pay much attention to orders?'

`You'll see,' Hawthorne replied. 'And when you do - you'll understand'

`But Thorny, I can't just -'

`Leave it, Nicholas. I made the general a promise and I'm not going to break that, even for you. Now let me get some bloody sleep!' He rolled

away, grumbling under his breath. Johnson lay in the darkness, frustrated and wide awake.

I'll never get to sleep now, he realised. Eventually the young soldier got out of bed and went in search of Vol mer.

Johnson had to talk to someone and the sergeant would probably be glad of the company. It was worth a try.

Chapter Seven

February 20, 1863

The man slumps backwards to the floor, his face haggard and wan. A graze above his left eyebrow and the dried blood on his knuckles give a mute testament to his ordeals, as does the grey-green mud caked on his clothing. Beneath him the floor starts to swirl and ripple, as if about to swallow him up. He is dying and he knows it, all effort to stave off the inevitable draining from him now, the fight over, the cause lost. You look down on his kindly face and recognise him. You don't want to see him suffer any more but you know he must go on, he must fight back. You feel yourself reaching out to him, whispering soft words into his mind. You tell him he is needed, that he mustn't die. But you can feel him slipping away, his grasp on this life finally surrendering -

Nyssa wanted to open her eyes, not sure whether she was waking in a dream or from one. She felt the sun on her face, comforting and familiar. Under her hands was a path of stone, gently warmed by the heat from above. A scent caught her attention, a smell she had not experienced since - since Traken, she realised. Nyssa opened her eyes and sat up, finding herself in the grove where she had played so often as a child. Sprawling ivy and flowering plants stretched out to take advantage of the warmth. Of course, this couldn't be the grove on Traken - that had been destroyed with the rest of her planet and its people. But it still felt like home.

'Beautiful here, isn't it? Like being inside a dream.' A man was standing in the shadows, admiring his surroundings. 'If this is a dream, you never want to wake from it. You want it to go on forever.'

'I often dream about you,' Nyssa said.

I know,' her father replied, sadness in his gentle voice. 'It's a strange thing, being dead. Not at all what I expected. I thought it would be like falling asleep, just drifting into an eternal rest. Being at peace, no troubles, no fears - like an endless embrace.' Tremas stepped out of the shadows, his greying hair swept back from his face, the features just as Nyssa remembered them before the Doctor came to Traken.

And what is it like being dead?' she asked.

'That you will have to find out for yourself. You are still very much alive, my daughter. But you can choose to stay here, if you wish - with me.'

Nyssa stood and began to wander idly between the stone columns and lush tendrils of the grove, her hands roaming over the familiar plants and structures. She wanted to run to Tremas, to hug her father and never let him go, but something was holding her back. The Doctor's final warning was still occupying her thoughts. How could she trust her own senses in this place? 'This could all just be an illusion,' she said eventually, 'a near-death hallucination brought on by my brain being starved of oxygen. Last thing I can recall, I was drowning at the bottom of a murky river. Now I am alive and well, my clothes are dry and I'm back in the grove at home.'

Some, if not all, of that is quite impossible.'

'You never used to be this narrow-minded,' Tremas said, disappointment plain in his tone. 'What has happened to you, my child? I taught you to be a good scientist with an enquiring mind, dismissing nothing until you knew more about it. You have been awake just a few minutes and already you are denying the reality that surrounds you. Just because you cannot explain this place does not make it any less real.'

'But how can I believe?'

'We cannot give you faith, you must find belief within yourself.'

Nyssa shook her head sadly. 'I want to believe you live on in this place. I want to believe all this is real but... Yes, I should have an open mind to any possibility. But faith without proof is a very difficult enigma for a good scientist to accept.'

I know' Tremas smiled as he approached his daughter. 'I had the same questions when I first arrived here. But someone helped me to believe.'

'Who?'

'Someone who has been longing to meet you.' He reached out his arms and Nyssa accepted the embrace, still uncertain of her feelings. But the sensation of being held once again in her father's arms was so familiar, so welcome... This was what she had needed, Nyssa realised. To feel she belonged, that she was loved. It was what everybody needed, she supposed. It would be so easy to give in to this, to surrender herself. Tremas sighed. 'I told her you might be coming here. She suggested I meet you, help you adjust to this new world. Only when I thought you were ready would she make herself known. This person has waited a lifetime to know you.'

Nyssa looked up at her father's face. 'What's her name?'

'Lucina,' a voice replied from behind them. Tremas stepped away from his daughter so she could see who was speaking. A woman walked into the grove, dressed in a long flowing gown of crimson and gold. Her face was friendly, with high cheekbones and wide eyes framed by a mass of brown curly hair. For Nyssa it was like looking at an older, more serene reflection of herself. 'Welcome to the Other Side, my daughter.'

For the first few days at Corra Linn it was birdsong that had woken Vollmer each morning. But now the sun rose to a chilling silence, just the sound of distant water audible from the river below. The sergeant had been down to the pontoon several times during his nocturnal patrols. On each occasion the water's edge had been further away from the pontoon. The wooden platform no longer floated on the Clyde. Instead it hung out over a dry bank as the flooded valley reappeared from beneath the receding waters. The sergeant found no sign of Nyssa, dead or alive.

Vollmer had been pleased when Johnson joined him during the night, unable to sleep. A solo patrol gave you far too much time to think and the young private made for good company. The two men helped keep each other awake, contemplating events of the past few days. Neither of them mentioned it, but the sergeant felt sure Johnson was just as nervous as him about what they might face in the darkness.

Their task was made no easier by a low mist that descended on the hillside, cutting visibility among the bare tree trunks.

It was just as the sun was beginning to bruise the gloaming that Vollmer heard the footsteps. Johnson was wondering out loud if he

might be chosen for the diving bell when the sergeant hushed him into silence. 'Listen!' Vollmer hissed. 'Can you hear something?'

The private did as he was bid. 'No,' he whispered. 'What am I -' The sound of fleet footfalls below the encampment cut short Johnson's words. 'I hear it! Coming from near the pontoon!'

Vollmer nodded and held a forefinger up to his lips, motioning the private to silence. They began creeping down the hillside in a slow arc, the sergeant venturing slightly upstream, while Johnson went in the other direction. By now the mist was hanging just above the Clyde, shrouding the water's edge as the two soldiers converged on the pontoon from opposite sides. Vollmer could hear something heavy moving across the wooden beams of the platform. He crept forward, the butt of his rifle pressed in hard against his collarbone, finger resting on the trigger ready to fire. Through the mist the sergeant could discern someone crouching by the far edge of the pontoon, bent over a fallen figure. Had the killer claimed another victim?

'Identify yourself or we shoot!' the sergeant shouted, but his demand went unanswered. By now Vollmer had reached the point where the pontoon touched the hillside, Johnson joining him. Still they received no reply. The sergeant gave the intruder three seconds to surrender. 'One!' The figure glared at the two soldiers, snarling with anger. 'Two!' Vollmer watched in horror as the intruder pushed its victim over the edge of the platform. 'Three!' The figure stood up and launched itself at the two soldiers. Both men fired, more in surprise than anger.

The intruder cried out, one hand clutching its chest, before collapsing face first in front of Vollmer and Johnson. The sergeant crouched beside the fallen figure. It was male, dressed in a ragged suit, the hair a mess of knots and tangles.

Vollmer reached out to roll the intruder over. 'Sergeant, be careful!' Johnson urged. 'He might not be dead yet!'

Vollmer pushed the unidentified man's shoulder, gently turning over the body. But it wasn't a man they had shot. It was a boy of no more than fifteen summers, his face young and unlined, a few wisps of downy hair visible on the chin and above the upper lip. 'My god, he's just a boy,' the sergeant realised. He checked the body for signs of life. A steady trickle of blood leaking out from underneath told Vollmer all he needed to know.

'He's dying. Quick, fetch the Doctor.'

Johnson staggered backwards a few steps, looking down at the weapon in his shaking hands, smoke still curling from the end of the barrel. 'I didn't mean to kill him...'

`Nicholas! Fetch the Doctor - now!'

The private stumbled away up the hillside, still clutching his rifle.

Ànd tell General Doulton what's happened!' Vollmer called after him.

Nyssa shook her head, slowly retreating from the woman who had just entered the grove. `No, you can't be my mother.

She died -'

`Giving birth to you,' Lucina replied. 'That was a lifetime ago for you but it seems like yesterday to me. I already knew something was awry, the midwife had told me so. She urged me to tell your father but I refused, and forbade her to do so'

'Why?'

`Because I knew it was my time. As my wedding present Tremas procured an audience for me with the Keeper. I wanted to know what my life would hold, that I was making the right decision in marrying your father. The Keeper showed me fragments of my future, warning me I would see happiness and great sadness among them. I knew I would die so you might live. But what greater gift could a mother give for her child than life?'

Nyssa looked to her father. 'You never told of this...'

Ì didn't know it all myself,' Tremas admitted. 'I had my suspicions but Lucina refused to speak of it, as did the Keeper. You know our rituals, my child. I could not interfere.'

Lucina sat down on a stone bench opposite Nyssa. Ì have imagined this meeting so many times, what we would say and do, wondering how you would react. And now that you're here

- I find myself quite undone'

Ì know how you feel,' Nyssa whispered to herself. She turned away from her parents, her eyes filling with tears. Ònly a few days ago the Doctor said I was guilty of suppressing my emotions, of keeping everything bottled up inside me. Now I can't seem to stop crying. If

my heart is so full of locks and keys, why does it keep coming apart?'

'The Doctor - who is this? Have you been unwell?' Lucina asked.

'He's a friend. My only friend now, I suppose. I travel with him.'

'Why is he your only friend?'

'We never stay in one place long enough to make new friends'

'That sounds a very lonely life' The woman approached Nyssa, gently turning her round so they were face to face. 'It doesn't have to be that way, my child. You could stay here, with your father and I. We could be a family for the first time.'

Would you like that?'

'Yes, more than anything. But...'

'But what?'

'The Doctor, he will expect me to return from this side of the rift. He won't understand if I never go back.'

'Would it help if you could talk to him - if you could explain?' Tremas asked.

The Doctor made his way gingerly down the hillside, movements restricted by the manacles and chains still shackling his ankles and wrists. After several stumbles and an undignified slide down the slope on his backside, the Doctor reached the pontoon where Vollmer was standing over a body.

'Oh, no... James.'

'You recognise this young man?' the sergeant asked.

The Doctor nodded sadly. 'James Lees. A few days ago Queen Victoria made him the Royal Medium to her court. What happened?'

'We heard an intruder on the pontoon. When we came down here to investigate, he refused to identify himself or surrender. Pushed what looked like a corpse into the water and then made a run at us'

Both men stepped back in surprise as James coughed twice, blood spattering his lips and teeth. The Doctor crouched beside him, bending forwards to examine his body.

'He's been shot through the chest. Missed the heart but punctured a lung. He's probably drowning in his own blood.

'There's nothing I can do for him' The Doctor motioned towards the pontoon. 'Look in the water. See if you can spot this corpse' James coughed again, words trying to escape his crimson-stained lips. The Doctor bent closer to listen.

'I was just... just trying to get back...' James gurgled.

'Back to the... Other...' He said no more, his last breath leaving his body with a faint rattle. The Doctor sat back on his haunches, shaking his head sadly.

'It's not a body,' Vollmer called, looking over the edge of the pontoon. 'It's one of the diving suits. He must have been trying to get it nearer the water.'

'He just wanted to get back to the Other Side,' the Doctor said, finishing the dead man's final words. 'Seven years of torment and now this. Not much of a life...'

In the distance Doulton's booming voice could be heard shouting at Johnson. 'What do you mean, the prisoner is already down there? What nonsense is this?'

'The sergeant said -'

'Who is in charge of this expeditionary force, Sergeant Vollmer or myself?'

The Doctor smiled at Vollmer. 'Time to face the music'

Lucina and Tremas led Nyssa from the grove into a tall stone building, its walls stretching upwards into the sky like fingers of granite. Inside was a vast central chamber with a mirror dominating the far wall. Nyssa ventured towards the reflective surface, urged on by her parents. 'Thousands of years before you were born, all on Traken had defences of the mind,' Lucina said. 'These fell into neglect due to the presence of the Source, but on rare occasions a baby would be conceived with glimmers of those lost skills'

'The Doctor said I had latent psychic abilities,' Nyssa recalled.

'Yes. I could feel them when you were growing inside me, reaching out, flexing. It was only by the ministrations of my midwife I was able

to carry you full term'

`You said on rare occasions a baby would be conceived with psychic abilities - why not born with them?'

Tremas could not look at his daughter as he spoke. `Few women ever survive carrying such a child. Normal babies kick in the womb, but psychic foetuses - they use more violent methods'

Oh no...' Nyssa whispered, horrified at what she was hearing.

Any such foetus was routinely aborted to save the mother. That was the tradition on Traken.'

`But you didn't...'

Lucina smiled. 'No. I knew I would die giving birth to you, for that was what the Keeper had foretold. And so it came to pass'

`You didn't die during childbirth,' Nyssa realised. 'I killed you. I murdered you!'

`Please, my child, you mustn't think of it like that. You didn't know, couldn't know what you were doing. It was a convulsive action, just as any newborn convulses after leaving the womb.

You were fighting for life - and you took that life from me to survive'

Nyssa shook her head. 'Why are you telling me this? Why now?'

`You are special, Nyssa. You have the potential to reach across the divide between this place and the mortal world. You must embrace your abilities, stretch forwards with your thoughts. Only when you have said goodbye to that life can you see this world as it is'

`He's gone' The Doctor stood up slowly, a weary resignation about his eyes. He looked down at the blood on his hands, rubbing the fingertips together, almost as if he was going to pray.

Then the general appeared, still fastening the gleaming buttons on his tunic.

`What is this spy doing here?' he demanded, a lifetime of bluster and bristle resonating from the bluff manner. 'Who said he could be released?'

Ì haven't been released,' the Doctor replied wearily, holding up his

wrists to display the manacles still in place, his skin rubbed red and raw by the harsh metal edges. 'Your sergeant thought I might be able to save this unfortunate'

The general glared the body on the ground. A puddle of blood had leaked out from beneath the corpse, providing a crimson reflection of the dawn sky above. 'What happened here?'

'Murder - of a sort. A court might call it manslaughter but I'm not so sure'

The general's eyes narrowed as he noted the blood staining the Doctor's hands. 'You did this, didn't you? I've seen death many times. That body has but a single wound, certainly not enough to be mortal. Somehow you -' The general's words trailed off as his attention was taken by a sudden and perplexing change. 'What the deuce is that?'

Nyssa closed her eyes, a fist clenched in front of her face. She felt a tiny nudge in her mind, as if she were bumping into something invisible. But when she tried to open her eyes again, she couldn't. 'You must focus, my child,' Lucina whispered.

'Concentrate on that which eludes you and reach out to grasp it'

Nyssa felt her fist opening, the fingers unbending to point ahead. She tried to think herself beyond the barrier in her way, a hollow absence opening inside as breath caught in her throat.

Then she was floating forwards, her knees bent, stomach fluttering. The mirror became a window in her thoughts.

* * *

A dripping sound was the first indication, like droplets of water falling from a great height in the distance. With each drip, the noise grew louder, more resonant. One by one, those gathered turned and looked towards the body. Something was moving beside it, something impossible. Blood was dripping, forming a pool.

But it was dripping upwards into the air.

With each drip the pool grew larger. Instead of spreading horizontally like water on the ground, the dark red accumulation hung vertically in the air. Soon it was the size of a plate, then of a portrait. Finally, when all the blood from beneath the body had been exhausted, the dripping stopped, leaving just the crimson pool suspended at head height like a

mirror of red mercury. Its edges were ragged as torn cloth, but the surface appeared flat and uniform, a slight sheen visible across it.

‘Interesting,’ the Doctor murmured. He shuffled towards the shape, his movements still hampered by the shackles. ‘I’ve never seen such a phenomenon before - I wonder what it signifies...’ He reached out to touch the hanging blood, the remnants on his own fingers seeming to pull his hands closer. The pool shimmered and the Doctor stopped himself, just before his fingers plunged into the blood.

‘Stay back from it!’ the general ordered. He pulled the rifle from the trembling hands of a soldier beside him. ‘Is this loaded?’ The soldier just shook his head, eyes still fixed on the apparition.

The Doctor peered into the viscous liquid, trying to focus on something beyond its surface. ‘I thought I saw a movement,’ he muttered. ‘There! Definitely something moving!’

Doulton dug into a discarded bag of ammunition on the ground and began loading the rifle. ‘Doctor, I am warning you - stay away from that - that - thing!’

But the prisoner ignored him, concentrating instead on trying to discern the meaning of the crimson apparition. A face... I can see a face...’

‘Your own reflection, man! Now step back or else,’ the general warned.

‘Or else what? You’ll do to me what your trigger-happy men did to him?’ the Doctor snapped back angrily, indicating the corpse by his feet. ‘There! There it is again - a face, and a familiar one at that!’

The others stared at the visage forming on the surface of the blood, the pool reshaping itself into a perfect oval. Redness faded from the centre of the apparition, to be replaced by a woman’s face. ‘Nyssa? Is that you?’

Nyssa gasped, surprise and delight in her voice. ‘Doctor! They said I could speak to you but I didn’t think it possible!’

‘Nyssa, are you all right?’ he asked anxiously.

‘Yes, I’m fine. Doctor - it was true, it was all true!’ ‘No, Nyssa, you’re -’

‘My father is here!’

The Doctor shook his head. 'No, Nyssa, Tremas is dead. You know your father is gone.'

'He isn't! He's alive, or alive again, or whatever happens in this place. And you won't believe who else is here.'

'Nyssa, please, listen to me carefully,' the Doctor pleaded.

'You must come back. You can't stay there!'

The young woman's face clouded with uncertainty. 'Why not?

What's wrong?'

Doulton finished loading the rifle and brought it up to his shoulder, taking careful aim down the long barrel. 'Doctor, step away from that devilish apparition - now!'

'No! I must warn her!' The Doctor didn't even look back at his captor. 'Nyssa, I haven't got time to explain now Please, just trust me. You! This is your last chance, Doctor!' The general rested his finger on the trigger. 'I'll give you three seconds to step away!'

'Nyssa, you must find the way back!'

'Doctor, I can't understand what you're saying. This place, it's everything I -'

One!'

'Nyssa, please, just listen to me -'

'Two!'

'Doctor, I -'

'Three!' The general pulled the trigger.

Suddenly the image shattered inwards, showering Nyssa with glass and blood. She felt as though something was ripping her backwards, a vast weight invading her body, slamming into her very being. Nyssa tumbled to the ground, pain stabbing into her chest. She looked down and realised she was bleeding. Just before she passed out, Nyssa thought she could hear someone screaming. Is that my voice?, she wondered as darkness closed in. It sounds more like a man's voice...

The Doctor cried out before collapsing to the ground, his features

spattered with blood. The sound of the shot still echoed around the surrounding hills, bouncing back and forth before slowly dying away. Then there was nothing. No birdsong, no sound from the Doctor's fallen body. Just a long, chilling silence. The general lowered the weapon from his shoulder and handed it back to the shocked soldier at his side, a hint of triumph about his lips. 'Is he alive?'

Vollmer bent over the prisoner's chest, listening for a heartbeat. 'Yes. I think he's in some sort of shock, sir.' The sergeant adjusted the position of his ear, perplexed by what he was hearing. 'Strange. Almost sounds like two hearts'

'He will soon recover - I shot that devilish apparition of blood, not the Doctor.' The general looked across at the dead body of James Lees, then at the other soldiers who had witnessed these strange events. 'When I first saw this young man's body, I asked the Doctor what had happened. He admitted it was murder. When I accused him of being responsible, he did not deny the charge. Instead he fashioned this vile illusion, this hallucination to distract us from his terrible crime. Well, I shall not be diverted from my course of action. I will lead another party through the gateway to the afterlife. When I return, the Doctor will be tried, found guilty of treason and executed by firing squad. Does anybody have anything they wish to say about my decision?' Doulton glared at his men venomously. Satisfied there was no objection, he called out a name. 'Clark?'

The lance corporal stepped forward and saluted the general. 'Yes, sir!'

'Begin preparing the diving bell for another journey.'

Clark glanced at the receding water level. 'At the current rate of decrease, that equipment may not be necessary, sir.'

'Nevertheless, we cannot foresee all that will happen in the next few hours. Better that we be prepared for any eventuality. Dismissed'

'Yes sir!' Clark wheeled away to start work, taking half the enlisted men with him.

Johnson sidled across to stand next to Hawthorne.

'Thorny, what do you make of that? It all looked real to me, I don't know what the general's going on about. If anybody is to blame for that bloke dying, it's me and the sergeant.' But his friend remained silent, staring balefully ahead. 'Thorny? It's me, Nicholas.'

Hawthorne blinked and then smiled at the other private. 'Sorry, I was miles away. What were you saying?'

Johnson shook his head. Doesn't matter.'

Doulton nudged the Doctor with a boot but got no response. 'Sergeant, move this carcass away from the launching area. I want him under constant guard from now on.

Vollmer stood up slowly. General, may I have a word with you in private?'

'Why in private? I have nothing to hide from my men!'

'Please, sir. I feel it would be for the best.'

'Walk with me back to my tent. I was still completing my morning ablutions when that young fool of a private summoned me here' Doulton set off up the hill at a brisk pace, the sergeant running to catch him up.

'General, I would never contradict or challenge your authority in front of the men,' Vollmer began, 'but I feel you are making a grave mistake by condemning the Doctor like this. If anyone should face charges for the killing of that boy, it's me. Johnson and I shot Lees in a panic when he would not identify himself. I am senior in rank to Johnson, therefore I should bear any and all responsibility for what happened. The Doctor was trying to save Lees' life at my request.

He should not be held culpable for the young man's death'

Doulton stopped outside his tent. 'You say the Doctor was trying to save Master Lees' life?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then you are correct. He shall not be executed for murder.'

'Thank you, sir. I was worried you would not see the sense of it. If you don't mind my saying so, you have been acting rather oddly of late, General.'

'Instead the Doctor shall be executed for criminal negligence.'

Doulton smiled. 'And as for you, Sergeant, I will hold you personally responsible if the Doctor is missing when I return from the Other Side. If the prisoner should escape, I will have you shot in his stead.

What do you think of that decision? Is that sensible enough for you?'

'I...'

'Never question my orders or my sanity again. Do you understand me, Sergeant?'

Vol mer snapped into a salute. Yes sir!'

'Very good. I suggest you get back to guarding the prisoner, since your life depends upon it'

Chapter Eight

February 21, 1863

Nyssa woke from a dreamless sleep, happy not to have wrestled with some vision in her slumber for once. Traumatic as the accident had been, it seemed to have put an end to her nocturnal horrors. She was in a place she knew better than any other, her bedroom on Traken. It felt good to be home again. She tried to sit up and winced, pain lancing across her chest. There was a dressing over the wound, held in place by bandages wrapped around her torso. Gritting her teeth against the stabbing sensation, Nyssa sat up and swung her legs off the bed. As always, her feet didn't quite touch the floor. All her childhood she had dreamed of being tall enough to sit on this bed and have long enough legs for them to reach the ground. When her father had heard of this, he suggested trimming a few inches off the bed's legs to make the dream a reality. But Nyssa's mother wouldn't hear of it. That would be cheating, Lucina had announced, and you should never cheat your dreams.

Nyssa stood and looked out of the window at the gardens.

She could see her father tending the trees and vines below, testing the success of his latest invention, an underground irrigation system. Soon it would time to gather the feijoa and tamarillo, and the house would be suffused with the sweet, sickly smell of fruit being boiled. The scent always made her gag a little, so strong and pungent was the aroma, but nothing was more redolent of the harvest season. She could mark the passage of time just by recalling what had happened to her with each harvest - starting lessons, getting her first guardian toy Bee-Bee,

becoming a woman, her first kiss... She wondered what this season would bring.

'Nyssa? Are you up yet?' Her mother was calling from the cooking area near the courtyard, the sound of cutlery and plates being passed from hand to hand signalling that the morning meal was nearly ready. 'Come and help with the table!'

'I'm just dressing,' Nyssa called back, not concentrating on what her mother was saying. The wound would hamper her movements for a few days yet, so she chose a simple dress of scarlet and crimson hues without too many fastenings. Putting something on her feet was too much like hard work so Nyssa ventured out into the courtyard barefoot, eager to quell the rumbling in her stomach. She couldn't remember the last time she had eaten and the cold collation of meats and fruits on the table looked delicious. Standing beside the table was a small child in a blue tunic, a pouch sewn into the material.

'Hello,' Nyssa said. 'Who are you? What are you doing here?'

The child whispered a reply. 'Don't trust them. Nothing here is what it seems.'

Lucina walked into the courtyard from the cooking area, a tray laden with steaming bowls of food balanced in her arms.

'Good, you're up at last. Your father and I were beginning to wonder if you'd ever get out of that bed. Clear a space on the table, you two'

Nyssa obliged, shifting the other food from the centre of the oblong table. The child had to kneel on one of the benches to help her. Once they were finished, Lucina laid her tray in the gap. 'There! Nyssa, go and call Tremas while your brother helps me bring in the rest.'

'My brother...' Nyssa stopped short, registering what her mother had said. 'But I don't have a brother. I'm an only child.'

Lucina looked at her in puzzlement. 'Of course you have a brother, Nyssa! He's standing right in front of you - aren't you, dear?' The small boy nodded, but his eyes widened as he looked at Nyssa.

Vollmer had ventured upriver to view the temporary dam, leaving Johnson and Hawthorne to guard the Doctor. The weak, winter sunshine had been enough to burn away the last remnants of morning mist. But clouds were forming in the distance and a cool breeze filtered through the trees around the encampment.

The sooner they got away from this place, the happier Vollmer would be.

The sergeant had come to a decision. Already the water level beyond the dam was more than halfway up the structure. They had a day, perhaps two before Clark's work gave way and a flash flood tore down the valley. Vollmer walked back into camp and relieved Johnson and Hawthorne from guard duty. Once the pair had moved off, the sergeant undid the chains binding the Doctor in place and took the prisoner for a walk. The two men strolled along the crest of the hill to a point from where they could see all the activity below.

'The water is just a quarter of its usual level,' the Doctor noted.

'The general won't need the diving bell for his next expedition'

'Doctor, I think you were right. Doulton - he's not in his right mind. He plans to execute you when he gets back. He said if you escaped, he would have me shot instead'

'Is that what you would expect from him?'

The sergeant shook his head. 'It's as if his reason is unhinged. The choices he is making, the orders he is giving. They make no sense to me' Vollmer decided he would have to trust this civilian. 'I've been up to view the temporary dam'

'How long will it hold?'

'Days. Perhaps only hours'

'That may be a blessing,' the Doctor said thoughtfully.

'Her Majesty will most likely be here later today. It is far too dangerous for her to visit this place. I don't know why the general invited her.'

'I fear that I do' The Doctor held up his manacled wrists. 'If you want me to help save the Queen, these shackles will have to come off. But once you do that -'

'I would be disobeying a direct order from the general' The sergeant sighed. 'Gross insubordination. He would not need an excuse to have me shot after that'

'Have you heard of the Rubicon?' the Doctor asked, but Vollmer shook

his head. 'It's a waterway in Northern Italy, not unlike the river below us. In ancient times it marked the boundary between Italy and Cisalpine Gaul. Julius Caesar led his army across the Rubicon in 49 BC and thus committed himself to civil war with the senatorial party of the day. Splendid chap, Julius, but far too trusting of those around him'

It was a point of no return,' Vollmer said.

'Yes. He committed himself irrevocably to a course of action. Take off my shackles and you will do the same' The Doctor held out his hands. 'I want to rescue my friend Nyssa from beyond the rift. I want to stop the general from making a terrible mistake. But I need your help, I can't do all of that alone. It's up to you, Sergeant'

Vollmer produced a tiny key. 'I'll do it, but there's no guarantee Clark or one of the others will not just put those shackles straight back on you again. The general has a very strong command of his men'

The Doctor smiled. 'Then we must find a way around that'

After the morning feast Nyssa volunteered to take her brother for a walk in the gardens, suggesting it would do them both good to get out of the house and feel the sun's warmth on their skin. Lucina was only too eager to accept. 'I know there are many seasons between you in age, but it would be good if you spent more time together. Besides, Tremas and I have much to discuss now you're home, Nyssa.' She gave her daughter an affectionate hug. 'It's good to have you back. Just don't let your brother kill any more birds with his slingshot. I know they peck at the fruit but their song is so lovely in the morning'

Nyssa slipped on some simple shoes before leading the young boy out of the courtyard and down some stone steps to the gardens. 'Who are you? What's are you doing here? I don't have a brother!'

The boy smiled. 'I have two brothers. Or maybe I just dreamed them. It gets hard to remember what's real if you've been here more than a day.'

'What's your name?'

'James. James Lees'

'But that's impossible,' Nyssa said. 'I met you in Windsor. I -'

She stopped, trying to hold on to that certainty in her head. 'I mean

I... I thought I had met you. But I...' Nyssa frowned. 'It's as if I've got another life in my head, another set of memories. But they keep slipping away.'

James nodded. Nyssa looked at his features and remembered another, older face - thinner and longer, but still the same. James wasn't her brother, she knew that much as a certainty. But why did her mother say that he was? Perhaps it was some after-effect of the accident, yet she couldn't remember suffering any memory loss. Then again, would she?

Nyssa could feel her thoughts tying themselves into knots.

'Before, you said nothing here is what it seems. What did you mean?' she asked.

'Come with me,' James replied, running ahead of her on the path between the trees. 'Come on! I'll show you the others.'

'The others? What others?' Nyssa called, hurrying after the boy.

The sun had passed its peak when Doulton was ready to travel back through the gateway. By now the water level had fallen still further, so the rocks of Corra Linn towered over what was left of the river. The pontoon jutted out uselessly over the slowly drying banks. The general gathered most of his men by the water's edge. Those who had already been to the Other Side were making preparations for the Queen's visit, tidying the camp and erecting a special tent should she choose to stay for the night. Doulton marched back and forth as he addressed the troops.

'Men, you are about to embark on the greatest adventure of your lives. On the Other Side you will see sights to amaze and astound. You may well be greeted by your dearly departed. They welcome all those who make the journey to the afterlife. Whatever happens, you must retain discipline. Follow my lead and no harm shall befall you. Are you with me?'

'Yes sir!' the soldiers shouted back in unison.

'Very well. Make ready to swim down to the gateway. It is now only a few feet below the surface and can be reached without special equipment. Dismissed!'

Private Johnson grinned broadly. At last he was getting a chance to see what Thorny had witnessed on the Other Side.

This was going to be the adventure of a lifetime.

James had brought Nyssa through the gardens and under a boundary marker to a tall stone building at the edge of the family estate. The circular tower was featureless and foreboding on this side, just a handful of gaps in the stone letting light inside.

'They keep the others in there,' James said, pointing at the hole just above the ground.

'Who are they?' Nyssa asked but the boy did not reply.

James was too busy scooping up pebbles and rocks from nearby and tucking them into his pouch. She dropped to the ground and looked inside. The cell was small and square, just big enough for a man to lie down without his head or feet touching the walls. It was dark inside and difficult to see how many men were being kept within the chamber, but Nyssa counted close to a dozen squeezed into the limited space. They were clothed in grubby red tunics and dark blue trousers, their faces wretched and terrified, even in sleep.

One of the men stirred, looking up at the hole in the wall. He seemed startled to see a face peering down at him. The man stood and approached Nyssa, reaching up a hand towards her. 'Are you an angel or a demon?'

'Neither,' she replied, pushing her hand between the bars to touch the tops of his fingers. 'Who are you? What are you doing here?'

'Please, you must help us. We have to get back!'

'Get back? Where did you come from?'

'The other side - we have to get back to the other side!'

Demons with the faces of our loved ones have been torturing us with visions, even in our sleep. Please - you must help us, Nyssa!'

That startled her. 'How did you know my name?'

'Don't you remember? We were -'

'What are you doing here?' an angry voice demanded.

Nyssa turned round to see a figure looming over her, the bright sun overhead turning her accuser into a menacing silhouette.

'This place is forbidden, even for you, my child'

`Father, I didn't know, I -'

Enough!' Tremas snapped. 'Well, you're here now, what's done is done. I suppose this day had to happen. Come!'

Tremas strode away round the building, pausing only to call for them. 'Follow me if you want to see what's inside!'

Clark had been on lookout duty for the royal entourage since the general had led three dozen soldiers down into the water.

The lance corporal paid little attention when he saw the three soldiers approaching, until he realised they were dressed in the uniform of royal household guards. The trio were marching ahead of the Queen, who was sitting side-saddle on a fine dappled mare. Behind her, two women in black picked their way through the undergrowth, faces curled in disdain. They were flanked by three more soldiers.

Clark hurried forwards to greet the royal entourage and lead it to the encampment. Her Majesty was unhappy that Doultton was not present to greet her, having summoned her to the site. Victoria announced her plans to leave in a few hours for Lanark, as it seemed there was no suitable accommodation closer. 'We did not travel for the better part of two days to be so treated,' she concluded.

It would have been safer if Your Majesty had not travelled here at all,' the Doctor replied. He walked into Her Majesty's presence and bowed deeply, followed by Vollmer.

Clark reacted with anger at seeing the prisoner without shackles. 'What is the meaning of this, Sergeant? The general ordered this murderer be kept in chains until he can be tried and executed!'

'What is this?' the Queen demanded. 'Who has been murdered and why do you speak of trials and executions?'

'Your Majesty, if I may explain -' Clark began, but was cut off by Vollmer.

'Silence, Lance Corporal! I outrank you and I shall tell Her Majesty precisely what has been happening here - not you' The sergeant's voice brooked no opposition and Clark reluctantly stepped aside, his face blushing a crimson close to the colour of his hair.

`What is your name, Sergeant?' Victoria asked.

`Vollmer, Your Majesty. Charles Otto Vollmer.'

`A good German name. Very well, you may speak'

The sergeant quickly outlined the events of the past few days, noting the general's increasingly irrational behaviour and the accusations of murder levelled against the Doctor. When Vollmer had finished, the Queen asked where James Lees' body was being kept. 'We should like to look upon his face one last time. He brought us hope,' she said quietly.

`The general has made no special provision for it, ma'am,' Vollmer said as he led her to the body, stored at the northern edge of the encampment. 'Coffins were purchased for the two officers who died but Master Lees' body is merely resting in a canvas bag' At the Queen's urging the bag was opened to expose the young man's face. She shook her head a little at seeing him.

`A great sadness,' Victoria said. 'But we feel certain of seeing him on the Other Side. Perhaps with our beloved consort.' She signalled for the bag to be pulled back up into place.

The Queen returned to her ladies-in-waiting and sent them off to prepare her lodgings for the night at Lanark, taking three of the household guards with them. 'Well, Doctor, what do you have to say for yourself?'

`Your Majesty, I know you have no reason to trust me,' he began. 'I have been accused of pretending to have an allegiance to Scotland Yard, of being an agent provocateur for a foreign power, of being an assassin and a murderer - but I am none of these things. I am simply a scientist intent on discovering the truth about the strange phenomenon you yourself experienced in the Mausoleum at Frogmore. I travelled north into Scotland at your request with my companion Nyssa to further this investigation. I believe the world beyond this gateway is not what it seems. I have no proof beyond my own suspicions but I believe them to be true.'

`Where is Lady Nyssa?' Victoria asked.

`My apologies, ma'am, I neglected to mention her earlier,'

Vollmer replied. 'The general took her through the gateway. He and his men returned, but she did not. We have no knowledge of her fate'

All of this is most distressing and irregular,' the Queen said. 'We arrive to find a once-trusted advisor bearing the marks of hours spent in shackles like the vilest of brigands. We learn of mysterious deaths and accidental killings. And we have been told wildly varying accounts of what lies beyond this gateway to the spirit world. 'Who are we to believe?'

A shout drifted up from the water's edge. 'There's someone coming back!'

'The general, no doubt,' Clark said with a smile. 'Now you shall know the truth of the matter, Your Majesty.'

'What is this place?' Nyssa asked. She and James were being led by Tremas down a circular flight of stairs within the tower. It was dark inside but a pale glow emanating from the walls offered enough light to see where they were going.

To everything there is an opposite, for every animal there exists a predator,' Tremas explained. 'Even in a paradise like this, evil can invade and insinuate itself.'

'But I thought all the Melkurs were dealt with by the grove,'

Nyssa said.

'Some horrors are beyond the power of even that sacred place to heal. This tower was built to house the unwanted, the unwelcome. It gave us no satisfaction but it was thought to be for the best. Others had more radical solutions'

He stopped at the foot of the stairs and gestured to a doorway.

'We keep our demons in here. Do you want to see them more closely, see these basest of creatures for yourself?'

James shook his head but Nyssa was willing to look inside. Tremas began to unlock the door but discovered it was already undone. 'Curious... that should not be.

Sometimes I fear we become too trusting, even in such a benign world as this' He opened the door and followed Nyssa inside. Ahead was the cell she had seen from outside, the men cowering against the far wall, keeping as far from Tremas as possible.

Nyssa felt a curious fluttering inside her mind. Something wasn't right

here, of that much she was certain. If only she still had her journal, she could be taking notes about all of this. Frustration clenched her thoughts, knowing a realisation was just beyond her reach. She examined the faces of the men. They all seemed so familiar, especially the one who had spoken to her earlier. Where had she seen him before?

`These are our guilty secret: Tremas explained. 'We keep them in this place until they are no longer needed. Then...' He sighed. 'Then we shall see.'

`Who are they? Where did they come from?' Nyssa asked.

`They invaded our paradise, intent on bringing their evil into our world. But that shall not be' Tremas rested a gentle hand on Nyssa's shoulder and began to lead her out of the cell. `Do you understand now why I did not wish you or James to come here? There is nothing of good to be -' He stopped and looked back at the captives. 'Where is he?'

A red-haired prisoner responded first. Who?'

Tremas launched himself at the captive, hands claspng the man's throat. 'Where is he? Tell me!'

The prisoner choked, trying to pull the fingers away from his neck. He – ackkk –‘

Nyssa tried to tear them apart. `Please, father, stop! You're hurting him!'

Instead Tremas tightened his grip, the sound of bone grinding against bone followed by cracking from the prisoner's throat. The dead man's eyes rolled back in his head and Tremas cast the corpse aside, reaching for another prisoner.

Nyssa staggered backwards, horrified at what Tremas was doing. 'Father, please!'

He glared at her over his shoulder, his features contorted with hatred. 'Silence, my child, or you will be next!' Tremas turned back to the prisoner. 'Where is the general?'

* * *

Doulton could not recall how long he had been on this side of the

gateway. When he first opened his eyes, the general found himself surrounded by old friends lost on the battlefield. They seemed pleased to see him, stripping away his diving suit and weapons. He would have no need of them here, they explained

- this was paradise, the world beyond death.

But Doulton had refused to give up his pistol, given to him by the Queen in gratitude for his gallant service in the Crimea. He had explained why he wanted to keep the weapon but the others wouldn't listen. They tore it from his grasp, their faces darkening into anger. When the general tried to take the pistol back, he was struck from behind. Falling to one knee, he felt more blows raining down on him. His friends had been replaced with others, men whom he had sent to their deaths in battles and skirmishes. Why did you kill us, they demanded, why did you sacrifice us? Your precious career, your military strategies - were they worth trading for our lives?

Doulton called to the Doctor for help but heard no reply. Instead he could just hear a distant screaming, like an animal in agony.

After that all was a blur of darkness and pain, voices swirling around him in a fever.

The general had come to in the cell, surrounded by nearly a dozen of his men. Clark saluted and gave thanks that Doulton was still alive. They had thought him dead, so still had his body been since they arrived. The soldiers had no way of knowing how long they had been in this place. They claimed it was Doulton who had led them through the gateway before bringing them to this place, but the general knew that could not be true - could it?

Later - perhaps days, perhaps only hours - the door to the cell had opened inwards and a young boy had peered inside.

Doulton was eager to leave but Clark and the others had volunteered to stay behind, in the hope it might mask the general's escape. He had never been prouder of any men under his command and told them so, saluting their bravery before he departed. The boy led him up a spiral stone staircase and out into the open air. Run towards the darkness, the lad had said, pointing at a black stain on the horizon. That leads you back. In the distance a woman's voice was calling for the boy, summoning James for a morning feast.

Doulton had run for what seemed like forever, wishing he was younger and fitter, regretting those late night glasses of port and fine

cigars. Suddenly he was surrounded by the blackness, veins of it reaching out across the ground and sky. Ahead was a vertical aperture, like an eye turned on its side. The darkness was seeping out of that, reminding the general of festering, gangrenous wounds he had seen in field hospitals. Could this be the gateway to his world?

He was about to venture forth into the aperture when it began to pulse and throb. Douulton could hear a familiar voice, urging others onwards, commanding them forwards. He retreated into the shadows beside the aperture and watched as dozens of soldiers poured through, all soaked to the skin, looking around themselves in wonder. The voice ordered them forwards, telling them to walk towards their dearly departed. Douulton watched in fascination as the men marched onwards, now being led by a figure in a general's uniform.

Once they had gone, Douulton emerged from the shadows and stood before the aperture. How had the soldiers been able to reach the gateway without diving suits? The general didn't want to think what fresh torments might be in front of him. He had no choice, he had to go back through and warn the others. It was his duty, as an officer and a gentleman. Douulton filled his lungs with air and plunged into the aperture, letting the darkness envelope him.

Hawthorne knew he was not a brave man. He had gone out of his way to avoid facing danger, always afraid he might be discovered a coward. So when the stranger had walked into the cell with Lady Nyssa, Hawthorne made sure his back was against the wall with several soldiers in front of him. The private did not believe he had anything to fear from the Doctor's travelling companion. Her bewildered face betrayed only her gentle nature. But the man -

his eyes had the same remorseless quality Hawthorne had seen in too many soldiers. The stranger would stop at nothing to get what he wanted. Strangely, Lady Nyssa called the man father, but Hawthorne could see no resemblance.

The private felt the bile rising in his throat when Clark died. The sound of bones snapping in the lance corporal's neck stirred a memory. At Christmas Hawthorne and Johnson had crept into the officer's mess after dinner and picked at the carcass of the turkey, scoffing down morsels left on the table. Next day Nicholas had produced the dried wishbone and cajoled Hawthorne into pulling it with him. Johnson had won and wished for a night in the bed of a beautiful lady. The sound made by the bones in Clark's neck, they were just like the snapping of that wishbone.

'Where is he? Where is the general?'

Nobody spoke.

'If you do not tell me I shall kill you one by one until none are left or somebody speaks. Well? What shall be your fate?'

Before he realised what he was doing, Hawthorne had stepped forward to face this murderous fury. 'Somebody unlocked the door and the general escaped. He wanted all of us to go as well but we volunteered to stay behind, so he would have a better chance. He should have found the gateway by now and gone back through to warn the others.'

The private sensed a flash of movement and felt a heavy punch crush his neck. He tried to cough but the breath wouldn't come. Something warm and wet was gushing from his throat, coating his fingers in crimson. Hawthorne's legs went numb and folded underneath him, his torso falling sideways to the cold stone floor. He looked up to see the other soldiers staring down at him in horror, cowering away against the wall. 'I must be a right mess, Hawthorne realised. He heard Lady Nyssa sobbing nearby but couldn't seem to focus on her features.

'You're not my father, you can't be,' she said. 'What are you?'

Hawthorne closed his eyes and tried to remember a prayer, but none stirred from his memory. He wondered what happened to anyone who died in the afterlife...

Vollmer had his rifle ready to fire as a lone figure emerged from the water, facing the opposite side of the river. 'Where am I?' the bedraggled man asked before turning around. It was the general, but he looked haggard, bruises mottling his face like marble. His eyes widened in surprise at seeing the Queen looking down at him from the pontoon. 'Your Majesty!' Doulton snapped into a salute. 'If I may be so bold, what are you doing here?'

'We travelled here at your request, General,' Victoria replied tersely.

'But I sent no such despatch. I would never...' Doulton's voice trailed away, his hands shivering as cold water dripped from them.

The Queen took command of the situation, telling Vollmer to have fresh clothes laid out for the general. She invited Doulton to take his leave of the river and dry himself off.

'Might we suggest a nip of whisky to calm your nerves? Once you are ready, we would hear all you have to say. We suspect the truth is yet to emerge.'

Nyssa sobbed, trying to ignore the gurgling sounds as another soldier died at her feet.

Tremas spun round, his features contorted with malevolent fury. 'Where is the boy? He brought you here, he discovered this place. He must have helped the general escape. Where is he?'

Nyssa shook her head, unable to answer.

Tremas marched out of the cell, dragging her behind him.

James had disappeared while they were inside with the prisoners. 'He'll be trying to escape through the gateway.'

Tremas's face sneered at Nyssa but it spoke with an unearthly voice, its breath rank with sweet, sickly odours. 'You will help us bring him back.'

'Your Majesty, I must ask you to leave this place immediately, It is not safe for you here.' Doulton was now standing before the Queen in the tent prepared for her. Victoria was flanked by her trio of household guards, with the Doctor, Vollmer and Clark to one side.

'You keep saying this but you do not tell us why. We require a reason'

The general swallowed hard before responding. 'Ma'am, I believe the gateway is, indeed, the portal to another world.

But I do not think it can be considered any sort of paradise.

Beyond this gateway is a purgatory of suffering and torment.

Perhaps within that realm there is another portal leading to the true life ever after, but I did not find any evidence of that. All I experienced was horror and suffering, ma'am.'

The Queen appeared crestfallen at this news. And you are certain of this?'

'Yes, ma'am. Upon my honour.'

'Very well. You have told us it is so, as has the Doctor.

Without seeing this realm for myself and with Master Lees already dead, it seems we must accept this truth - however painful it may prove'

The Doctor stepped forward. 'Your Majesty, I believe there is more at stake here than whether or not that portal leads to an afterlife. The general is correct when he says there is a grave threat present here, not just to your good self but to all of mankind.'

`How so, Doctor?'

`Before I can tell you, ma'am, there are some questions I must put to the general, with your permission' Victoria nodded her approval. The Doctor turned to Doulton. 'How long were you on the other side of the gateway?'

Impossible to say. There were no days or nights. It could have been just a few hours, or slightly longer.'

`So it would surprise you to learn that two days have passed since you and I entered the rift together?' The general nodded, stunned by this revelation. 'How many times have you been back and forth through the portal?'

Once when I entered that hellish place and again on my way back. Why?'

`Your Majesty, we have seen the general make two return trips through the gateway. He went back into it again not long before you arrived,' the Doctor said.

Vollmer confirmed this, adding that Doulton seemed a changed man after arriving at Corra Linn. The Doctor had another theory.

`The general did become a changed man - but only after his first return from the portal. At first I thought he was suffering from decompression sickness. I now believe the true Doulton was held prisoner beyond that rift while a doppelganger came back in his place'

À what?' the general asked.

The Queen cleared her throat. 'It is from the German, a legend about the ghostly duplicate of a living person'

Exactly, ma'am,' the Doctor said. 'General, did you see any of your own men on the other side of the rift?'

`Yes, I was held captive with close to a dozen of them.

Clark here was among them,' Doulton replied, pointing at the lance corporal. 'Come to think of it, how did you get back here before me? Where are the others?'

Clark smiled as he raised his rifle and aimed it at the Queen. 'Nobody moves or else I execute your monarch' The lance corporal made an unearthly noise through the side of his mouth, somewhere between a whistle and a bird of prey's cry. Soldiers rushed into the tent, quickly disarming the Queen's three guards and Vollmer.

`So, you have been replacing the general's troops with your own kind,' the Doctor said. 'But the doppelgangers have only entered into this world after the men they duplicate have travelled through to your side. At an educated guess I would say you can't pass freely through the rift to this dimension -

you need to replace someone who has already travelled to your realm'

`Doctor, what are you talking about? What is happening here?

If this is a mutiny, you shall all swing from the gallows for your treason!' the Queen warned Clark.

He stepped closer to her and pointed the end of his rifle at her forehead. 'Be silent or you shall join your beloved consort in the spirit world sooner than you expected.'

The Doctor was still thinking out loud. 'No duplicate of Nyssa or myself, I notice. So it's fair to surmise the doppelgangers can only adopt human form. The people of Traken or Gallifrey seem to be outside their repertoire. But what about James Lees -

he went through the rift and came back years ago - does that mean he was also a duplicate from beyond the rift? If so, where is the real James?'

'A small boy called James helped me escape,' Doulton whispered.

'All of you - be silent!' Clark commanded.

`But why keep him alive?' The Doctor sighed. 'Still too many questions...'

'I said be silent!' Clark smashed the butt of his rifle against the back of

the Doctor's head. The Doctor crumpled to the ground, blood throbbing from the wound.

'Why did you kill those men? They had done nothing to you!'

Nyssa was being dragged through a rose garden by Tremas, but she knew this creature was not her father.

'We did not want this,' it snarled back. 'We did not begin this.

We knew of the thin membrane between our worlds but avoided all contact with it. Beyond was only darkness and foreboding. It was beings from beyond the membrane that created the rift'

'The people of Earth - they are not my kind,' Nyssa protested.

'That much is true. We saw that in your mind'

'You wear my father's face and body like a mask'

'We took your memories, used them to recreate your father, your home.'

'And my mother? I never knew her. She died giving birth to me'

'She was taken from the darkest place in your subconscious, spun out of your own fears and guilt. She was a mirror of your feelings'

A rush of realisation overwhelmed Nyssa as her true memories began flooding back. 'James Lees - the James I met before passing through the rift - he was one of your kind'

'The boy chanced upon our world after the rift was created. We sent one of our own back in his place, as an ambassador. But those beyond the membrane held him prisoner. They tortured him and they murdered him,' Tremas snarled. 'We cared for the boy as if he were one of us and they murdered our ambassador. We shared his mind through it all, experienced all that he felt. He was dying, his human body collapsing under the strain of what he was made to do -

reaching into their minds and recreating the voices of their dead. He just wanted to come home but none would let him.

Just as he was about to return, they killed him. We all felt his passing. None of us had ever known or felt death before - but now we have. His death will spread among us, infecting us all, just as the horrors beyond the rift have infected our world with linear time. What kind of

monsters live in such a nightmare? What more barbarity can they visit upon us?'

Nyssa shook her head. 'You're wrong. They don't understand what they have done. They don't mean your kind any harm'

Tremas stopped. They had reached the edge of the rose garden. Ahead was just a barren plain, its horizon smeared with darkness. He pointed at the black, cancerous centre. This was a place of light and joy once. Then they flung one of their unborn offspring into our world, covered in blood, murdered before its time. That one act created this hole in our world. We fought back, sending our thoughts through to warn them away. But still they came. We took the lives of those that had damaged us. But still they came. You say they don't mean us harm. Yet the one called Doulton came here with thoughts of conquest and invasion and glory. The incursion of these monsters is destroying our world. That doom shall be visited back upon them.' Tremas lurched forwards again, dragging Nyssa towards the darkness.

To my wife Clara,

I write this letter in the hope it may one day reach you, although that hope is increasingly forlorn. By now you will probably know I was sent north into Scotland on a special mission. If you are reading this letter, it means someone has retrieved it from my body and I am almost certainly dead.

Please do not grieve on my behalf. I cannot say I have been the best of husbands to you, for that would be a lie and this not the time for such falsehoods. I have been selfish and arrogant, and I have been no sort of husband for you - certainly not the husband you deserve. All my life I longed to meet a woman as kind and gentle as you.

When I did, I thought myself the luckiest of men.

But I failed you. Perhaps if we had been able to have a child, it would have brought us closer together. But when our marriage was not so blessed, we grew cold with each other and so did our bed. I do not know who was to blame and blame is not important any more Just know this and I can rest in peace, content to have made good with you at last.

I love you, more than I have loved anyone else in this life, certainly more than I have loved myself I betrayed y o u , n o t w i t h a n o t h e r w o m a n , b u t w i t h m y h e a r t .

I turned away from you when you needed me most and for that I can only beg God's forgiveness - if there is such a thing. I hope you find someone else

who can grant you the happiness you so much deserve, and pray that one day you may forgive me my sins.

If you still feel esteem towards me after reading this, on my birthday will you go into a church and light a candle for me? I have no heir to carry on my family name and will leave you little upon which to live. At least you will still remember me when I am gone.

Forgive me, my darling Clara. Perhaps we shall see each other one day in a better place. Until then, I wish you well and will picture your face as I pass from this life.

Your loving husband,

Charles Otto Vollmer.

The sergeant folded away the letter and pushed it into a pocket for safekeeping. He had written it several nights earlier, after going through Lieutenant Ashe's personal belongings. It seemed the right thing to do at the time and now he was more certain of that than ever. He just had to hope someone would find the letter and deliver it to his wife.

'This is getting to be an unfortunate habit,' the Doctor said wryly, examining the shackles around his wrists and ankles.

'Speak for yourself,' Vollmer replied. 'Some of us aren't so used to being held prisoner, not by our own men.'

'But these *aren't* our men,' Doulton protested. 'If they were I'd have them all up on a charge of mutiny.' The trio had been chained to the exterior of the TARDIS, along with the three household guards. The Queen was being held captive elsewhere while Clark and most of the doppelgangers were busy in the valley below. The river had all but disappeared now, just a few pools of water left in hollows.

The general twisted his head sideways to look at the Doctor. 'What the deuce do you think they are doing down there?'

I have my suspicions and none of them are very comforting.

Vollmer, what's in those crates they are taking to the riverbed?'

Explosives. We brought enough to start a small war. Some were used to create the temporary dam upriver, but most are being positioned around that damned gateway. They seem intent on widening it'

`By how much?'

'If they're not careful, most of this hillside will be blasted to kingdom come'

`That's what I was afraid of.'

'What do you think they are planning, Doctor?' Doulton asked. 'Blow a hole big enough to march an army through as the first phase of an invasion?'

'Nothing so prosaic. No, I think they want to further destabilise the weakness in the space-time continuum'

'The what? Speak English, Doctor!'

'The rift. It's not a gateway between worlds, it's more like...'

He paused, apparently deep in thought.

'More like what?'

'Sorry, I was recalling an old analogy of mine. Imagine the rift is like a tear in a paper bag full of water. The bigger the tear-'

'The more water escapes?' Vollmer suggested.

'Quite. But what happens if the bag is suddenly torn apart?'

The sergeant shrugged. 'No more bag. Just pieces of paper left'

The Doctor nodded. 'And whatever was inside the bag is spilled out everywhere. But instead of water, it's the Other Side of the rift that will be spilling out here -'

'So what's the paper bag?'

'This planet. Everything and everyone you have ever known, cared about or loved will be destroyed, torn apart' This silenced the others. It was Doulton who spoke first.

'Then we must find a way to stop these bounders,' he announced. 'I won't stand here and let them threaten our Queen and country. Sergeant?'

Vollmer nodded. 'I'm in. What about the rest of you men?'

The household guards all agreed. The sergeant turned back to the Doctor. 'But how can we stop them?'

It will not be easy or without sacrifice, but little worth achieving ever is. Fortunately, those from beyond the rift are so intent on their task, they have left us momentarily unguarded.'

The Doctor twisted his body sideways and then leaned back towards Vollmer. 'Sergeant, can you reach my coat pocket?'

Your key should still be hidden inside'

'Yes, just... got it!'

'Good. Unlock your own shackles first. I need you and two of the enlisted men to set off first if we are to have any chance.

Now, which of you is the best shot?'

One of the household guardsmen cleared his throat. I am.

Private Morrison, Benjamin Morrison. I won the regimental medal for marksmanship'

Ever killed a live target?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, I hope that will not be necessary today. You are our insurance policy.'

* * *

Nyssa was surprised to see more' than thirty British soldiers waiting outside the portal, gathered around a body slumped on the ground. Behind them a pulsing black aperture towered over the scene, tendrils of darkness stretching outwards from it across the sky. The troopers seemed unaware of its throbbing, malevolent presence.

'Those soldiers should be with the others.' Tremas lurched towards the men. 'Where is your commanding officer?' The troopers parted to reveal General Doulton lying on the ground, a livid gash across his forehead.

Private Johnson cleared his throat. 'He seems to have been injured, sir. We came through the gateway with the general but just afterwards he cried out in pain. We've been waiting here for him to recover.'

`Nyssa!' a voice whispered. She turned to see James step out of the shadows beside the aperture, clutching his slingshot. `Now's our chance to go back!'

The Doctor watched Morrison creep across the empty riverbed above Corra Linn to the opposite riverbank, the private staying in a low crouch to avoid being seen by the doppelgangers below. Doulton appeared at the Doctor's side, bloody hands clutching a small wooden box. 'Got it,' the general hissed. 'Let's see those scoundrels blow anything up without the detonator.'

`How many did you kill to get that?' the Doctor asked quietly.

`Just one. Cracked him across the head with a rock, opened his skull like an egg'

The Doctor shook his head sadly. 'That wasn't necessary.'

‘I am a warrior, Doctor. I fought for what's right all my life and I fully intend to die fighting' Doulton wiped the worst of the blood off his hands. 'Now what?'

‘I have to resolve a dilemma,' the Doctor replied. 'My friend Nyssa, the boy James and your soldiers are still trapped on the other side of the rift. The leader of the British Empire is being held captive by beings from another world. The fabric of time and space is about to be ripped apart, the TARDIS isn't ready for another trip yet and in a few minutes a flash flood will sweep down this valley, drowning everything in its path' He sighed.

'No matter what I do, I can't save everyone'

`Where do you think Nyssa and the boy will be?'

`Hopefully trying to find their way back to this side of the rift.

But I can't risk trying to rescue them and becoming trapped on the other side. I will need the TARDIS to repair the damage if those explosives around the rift are detonated: Doulton glanced at the tall blue box nearby. 'Your equipment, it can fix the - how did you put it - fix the hole in the paper bag?'

`Yes, I think so'

‘In that case, the solution is simple,' the general said. 'You distract those invaders long enough and I will go through the rift. With any

luck I can rally my men and get your friend and the boy back here before it's too late. But you must also protect Her Majesty.'

The Doctor looked at Doulton closely. 'You realise what happens if you don't make it back through the rift?'

The general nodded. 'In all conflicts, some sacrifices have to be made.' He handed over the detonator. 'This should provide excellent bait for your diversion. Good luck, Doctor.'

At the temporary dam, Vollmer and the two household guards had almost finished preparing the explosives. The Doctor had given precise instructions about the best positions in which to place the charges and how to wire them in sequence.

'Once the first one blows, it will set off a chain reaction. That should destabilise the structure enough for the weight of the water beyond it to start pushing through the gaps. When that happens...'

'But how will I know when to detonate?' the sergeant had asked. 'From that far upriver we'll have no idea if it is safe for you and the others to set off the explosives.'

The Doctor had nodded grimly. 'We have one advantage over our enemy - surprise. When we hear the explosions we'll know what's coming. I estimate anyone in the path of the water will have thirty seconds to get clear - a minute at most. Just detonate when you're ready. We can't afford to wait any longer. Now go!'

Vollmer shoved the last of his explosives into a crevice halfway up the dam, below two large boulders. He looked round at the men who had been helping him. 'All the other charges in place?' They nodded nervously. 'Good. Now we start wiring them together.'

The doppelganger Clark was supervising the placement of the explosives beneath the gateway, using the knowledge he had torn from the real lance corporal's mind. The soldiers had to shield their eyes as they worked, so bright was the glare from the gap in the riverbank. Clark urged his men to work faster, all too aware that the light escaping outwards into this world was bleeding from his own. But soon the bleeding would be staunched - one way or another. All that remained was to connect a cable to the detonator. But when Clark sent a private to fetch the box, he returned empty-handed.

'You haven't been looking for this, have you?' The shouted voice was that of the Doctor, but Clark could not be sure from where it had

come. Sound bounced around the sandstone boulders, deceiving the senses.

'I'm up here!' A lone figure waved at the soldier from atop Corra Linn, holding a small wooden box up in the air. 'You'll find it surprisingly difficult to explode all of that without a detonator. I'm just off to rescue Her Majesty. Did anybody want to stop me?'

Clark shouldered his rifle and fired at the Doctor, the other soldiers following his example. Once the shooting had stopped, he reappeared above them. 'Is that the best you can do? You're all a disgrace to those uniforms'

'Get that detonator!' Clark commanded, sending half his men up one side of the precipice and the rest up the other side. He was so intent on following their progress he didn't notice the, lone figure slipping into the rift.

Nyssa crouched beside the boy. 'Even if we go back, there is no guarantee you'll find the home you expect, James.'

Time moves differently here. The life you knew - it's gone'

'I don't care,' he whispered. 'I still want to go back. I don't belong here'

Nyssa stood up again and looked over at Johnson and the other soldiers. 'But we can't leave those men here either. We have to take them back with us'

The real General Douulton stepped through the aperture. 'Don't worry about my men, Lady Nyssa, I'll take care of them. You and the lad had best be getting back - while you still can. My men and I will do the rest. Now go!'

The duplicate Clark could no longer see his men. All the doppelgangers had clambered up the sides of Corra Linn in pursuit of the Doctor, disappearing beyond the rock precipice.

Clark knew from the memories of the real lance corporal that another detonator had been left at the temporary dam. If necessary they could recover that one and use it to blow the rift apart. Clark heard gravel moving behind him and spun round, rifle ready to fire. Your

Nyssa had just stepped through the portal, carrying James on her left hip. 'Not much of a welcome,' she said. 'I'd put my hands up but they're full, as you can see.'

'How did you escape?' Clark demanded.

'I think you have more pressing concerns,' Nyssa replied, looking over Clark's shoulder to the other side of the riverbank. She rested a hand over James's eyes. 'Don't look,' she whispered to the boy.

A single shot rang out and Clark fell to the ground, clutching his wounded arm. A soldier emerged from behind rocks at the far side of the riverbed: The Doctor sent me. We must get you away from here.

That shot will soon bring back the others.'

'Your Majesty?' The Doctor stepped into the Queen's tent, still carrying the detonator. She was sitting in a chair, her hands clutching a locket. Inside was a tiny picture of her late husband.

'Doctor? We thought you had been taken prisoner. 'Victoria stroked one finger across the portrait before snapping the locket shut.

'For that matter, where are our captors?'

The guard outside your tent is unconscious and will be so for some hours -' The Doctor's words were cut off by a single shot in the distance. 'It has begun. Your Majesty, you must leave this place. I cannot guarantee your safety.'

The Queen stood, shaking off his concern. 'No, Doctor. We came here for a purpose and that has not yet been fulfilled: Then the screaming began.

* * *

General Doulton strode towards the soldiers, his back ramrod straight, his chin held high. 'What is the meaning of this? Why are your men not properly acknowledging the presence of a senior officer?' he demanded.

The three dozen men turned as one and automatically snapped to attention. Then they saw the face of the officer approaching them.

None dared speak for several seconds, Johnson finally breaking the silence.

'General Doulton? But you can't be there - you've over here...'

The private pointed down at the prone body on the ground. It still wore the uniform of a general in the British Army but the face was

just a blur. Standing over the body was another creature, its features also abandoning their human characteristics.

The creature threw back its head and screamed, a terrifying cry rending the air. Doulton and the soldiers tried to shield their ears from the cacophony, blood beginning to trickle from their noses. 'Fall back!' the general screamed. 'Fall back to the gateway!'

'*Gute Fraiichen...*: The voice was indistinct at first, just a muttering beneath the horrific scream. But the words soon became more audible, along with the sound of someone approaching the outside of the tent. 'Are you there?'

'Albert?' The Queen strained to hear the voice. 'My beloved, is that you?'

'*Weibchen*, where are you?'

'Coming, my beloved, I'm coming: Victoria began to leave the tent but the Doctor stepped in front of her.

'Your Majesty, listen to me. That voice - it may sound like your husband but it is an illusion. Do not believe it,' he urged.

'I must go to him!'

'No, Your Majesty. You have to listen to me!'

'Come to me, *kleines Frauchen*, let me embrace you again.'

Victoria pushed open the tent. Standing outside was the corpse of the duplicate James Lees, its face contorted back into some semblance of life. Lids fluttered over sightless eyes and dark crimson blood splattered from between blue lips.

The head was tilted to one side, while both arms were raised in a crude mockery of someone waiting to be hugged. 'My *Weibchen*, my love,' the corpse whispered, speaking with Prince Albert's voice. 'No! No!' Victoria cried out before fainting into the Doctor's arms. He lowered her carefully to the ground before approaching the grisly apparition. The Doctor stood in front of the resurrected corpse and folded his arms.

'If you want the Queen, you'll have to get past me'

When the screaming began James went into spasm, his body twisting

and jerking out of Nyssa's grasp. He fell to the ground, his head cracking against a rock. The private ran across the dry riverbed past the wounded duplicate of Clark to help Nyssa with the boy. 'We must get you both away from here,' Morrison shouted, straining to be heard over the cry howling out from inside the rift. 'This whole valley will be underwater within minutes!'

Nyssa bent over James's face, straining to hear anything but the nerve-jangling screech. 'He's stopped breathing! We can't risk moving him. I have to revive him first' She pressed her mouth over the boy's lips while pinching his nose shut and blew. James's chest rose and fell as Nyssa tried to breathe life back into him.

'You cannot stop us,' the doppelganger gurgled. It stretched out an arm to grab at Morrison. The soldier lashed out with his rifle, smashing the butt into the impostor's head. The duplicate cried out in pain, its face distorting into a featureless blur.

Morrison began reloading his rifle, fingers working urgently while his eyes searched the surrounding hills. 'We're sitting ducks out here. Those things could be back at any moment.'

Nyssa stopped to listen again. 'There . I think... Yes, he's breathing again!'

Morrison scooped up the boy in his arms and began striding to the edge of the riverbank. Nyssa followed him but it was already too late. A single shot rang out, ricocheting off a rock in front of Morrison.

'I don't think so,' Private Hawthorne's doppelganger said, no trace of emotion in his voice. He was standing atop Corra Linn with the other duplicates, looking down at the trio. The impostors raised their weapons and took aim at Nyssa, James and Morrison.

General Doulton had formed his men into three ranks of twelve.

Those with their backs to the aperture were standing, the soldiers in the middle rank were crouching on one knee and the men of the front row were lying on the ground. All had their rifles loaded and ready to fire, they just needed a target. The screaming continued tearing at their minds, but the source of the cacophony had melted away into the distance.

'I promised the Doctor we would hold our positions here and keep the enemy at bay until Her Majesty could be taken to safety,' the general explained, shouting to be heard above the caterwauling. 'We don't

know how long that will be, nor do we know the strength of our foe. Heaven knows what monsters they can conjure up to send against us. Whatever happens, we must stand our ground. Is that understood?

`Yes, sir!' the soldiers replied in unison.

`Very well' Douulton nodded with satisfaction. He would have expected no less, but it made him proud to stand alongside such men. The general planned to recommend them all for commendation - if they got out of this purgatory alive.

Then the demons came.

`Your plans seem to be going awry,' the Doctor commented. 'What was it - persuade the Queen to go through the portal, then replace her with one of your doppelgangers in preparation for an invasion? Why the change of plan? You must know blowing apart that rift risks destroying your own world as well as this one'

`You do not understand,' the corpse gurgled, now speaking in the voice of Adric. 'You know nothing of what you speak' It explained about the infection seeping outwards from the rift, how its kind had lost their immortality to the contagion of linear time.

The Doctor was aghast at hearing this. It was you who sent the ghost of Adric to the TARDIS, wasn't it?

`Yes. We reached out sideways across time and space to find you, drawing you to one of our kind. We believed you could help us stop this invasion - but they kept coming, more and more of them, dooming our world. So we decided to strike back'

`Speak in your own voice. You have no need to hide behind the dead any more'

`Very well' The boyish tones of Adric were replaced by a harsh, guttural voice. Each word was gasped, forced out through the stiffening vocal cords of the duplicate James's corpse. 'This body was once our ambassador to this world but it was abused, tortured and finally murdered. We shall have our vengeance!'

`Not this way,' the Doctor said. 'The people of this world seem barbaric to you but they are just children'

`We have experienced what they do to their own children.

Why should we do any different to them?'

'Go back now,' the Doctor pleaded, 'while you still have a chance. You brought me here to help. Let me do that. Let me seal the rift from this side - permanently. Perhaps a way can still be found to isolate the effects of this contagion'

'No, it is too late for that. We shall do unto this world what it has done to ours'

The first explosion silenced the creature. The Doctor's shoulders sagged. 'You should have gone back when you had the chance,' he said. 'Now it's too late' The Doctor looked back at the unconscious body of the Queen...

You open your eyes and see him. Is this another dream?

you ask. He smiles and nods. Yes, he says. I came to say goodbye. You run forward and embrace him, wanting to hold him one last time. Don't leave me, you beg, please don't leave me again. I have to go, I have to move on, he says sadly. He reaches down and gently touches your chin, tipping your face up so he can look into your eyes one last time. You must do the same. You shake your head, not wanting to hear the words. You know I'm right, he says. Find a new happiness. He kisses you once, on the forehead and then steps back and smiles.

Remember me, he whispers. You close your eyes and when you open them he is gone...

Nyssa was pulled back to reality by the explosions, dull crumps of noise echoing down the valley. Atop Corra Linn the doppelgangers looked about in confusion.

'That's the dam being blown,' Morrison shouted to Nyssa.

'We've got to get out of here before the flash flood hits!' He was already running towards the riverbank, still holding James in his arms. Nyssa followed his example.

'Don't let them escape!' shouted the duplicate Hawthorne.

'Open fire!'

'It didn't work,' Vollmer said, leaning back against a tree. When the dust began to clear, the temporary dam was still in place. A few new holes had been created in it but the rest of the structure remained

resolute against the Clyde. 'We must have put the explosives in the wrong places' The sergeant rubbed a hand through his hair, suddenly aware of how exhausted he was.

It had all been for nothing.

As the last echoes of the explosions died away, a new sound could be heard. Faint at first but growing ever louder was a distinct hissing. Vollmer peered down into the valley. 'What the hell...?' His words faltered as he saw the streams of water arcing outwards from the dam. A deep rumbling began to build, overwhelming all other noises. 'It's going!' the sergeant screamed in delight. 'It's going!'

With that, a huge chunk of the dam was pushed out of place, tumbling away in a mighty surge of water. More and more of the dam began to give way as the river tore through, resuming its journey down the valley.

'Front rank - fire!' The first row of twelve shot at the advancing creatures and immediately began to reload.

'Middle rank - fire!' the general bellowed, the men of that row following the example of those in front of them. 'Rear rank - fire!'

By this time the first row was ready again, their rifles taking aim at the enemy. 'Front rank - fire!'

The creatures were humanoid but the resemblance stopped there as far as Doulton could see. Faces were demonic visages, the stuff of battlefield nightmares. Bodies were mottled blues and greys, flailing masses of flesh that seemed to blur before the general's eyes. They attacked in waves, flinging themselves at the soldiers. Doulton knew that the supply of ammunition his men were carrying was limited. There seemed no way they could win this battle. But he had made a promise to the Doctor and that promise would be kept. It was his duty and the duty of all his men. It was their honour.

To one side of the main enemy force the general saw the creature that had been masquerading as him. It had recovered and was now directing the demonic attackers with that damnable screaming. Doulton drew his service revolver and took careful aim, a single shot blowing the creature's head apart.

The screaming stopped, just the sound of battle filling the air.

'That's better,' the general muttered.

As the last echoes of the scream faded away, the dead duplicate of James collapsed to the ground. Whatever force had been animating it was gone. The Doctor examined the corpse before gently closing its eyelids. 'Rest in peace'

Victoria stirred on the ground. The Doctor crouched beside the Queen, helping her sit up. 'Your Majesty, are you all right?'

She nodded, her eyes wet with tears, one hand still clasped around the locket. 'I saw him,' Victoria whispered. 'Not one of these impostors. I saw my beloved...'

Their attention was distracted by the sound of approaching thunder. The Doctor stood up, tilting his head to one side as he listened to the growing crescendo. 'The river,'

he realised. 'Nyssa!' The Doctor turned back to the Queen. 'Your Majesty, if there is still a chance to save my friend -'

'Go,' she urged.

Morrison cried out in agony, stumbling on the stones as one of the shots punctured his right leg. Nyssa turned back to see the private struggling to reach the side of the riverbed. 'Give me James!' she called, more shots zipping past her as she returned to Morrison.

'No, keep going!' he shouted.

'You're wounded, you won't make it,' Nyssa replied, struggling to be heard over the gunfire. Another sound was growing louder by the second. 'That's the river coming for us.'

Now come on! We can carry him if we work together!

Morrison nodded at the sense of this and let Nyssa take the boy's legs. Together they began to clamber up the side of the valley, shots still raining down on them from the soldiers atop Corra Linn. Suddenly the Doctor was by their side. He grabbed James and began running back up the hill. 'Nyssa! Help the private to safety!'

The quartet clawed their way upwards, the roar of the approaching river growing ever louder, overwhelming all words.

The air around them was becoming moist as spray was thrown ahead of the surging flood. Then, when Nyssa thought the noise could get no louder, the water was upon them all. She stopped to look back,

turning in time to see the torrent burst over Corra Linn. It threw the soldiers into the air like a playful cat before dashing their bodies on to the rocks below. The deluge hit the riverbed and exploded, flying forwards and sideways and swallowing everything in its path.

The water tore at the banks, trees and boulders from the shattered dam joining the tumult. Corra Linn was alive again and reaching out, determined to engulf all around it. Nyssa ran on up the hill, the ground crumbling away beneath her feet, the river rampaging around her. She slipped and almost slid back down into the hungry water, but Morrison grabbed her arm and pulled her to safety. Still the deafening noise roared on, before finally beginning to abate. Nyssa realised she was soaked to the skin - but she was alive.

Vollmer was last back to camp, his side aching from a stitch. He had stopped running and walked the final section, watching the last remnants of the temporary dam floating by. The sergeant found Nyssa nursing a young boy while Morrison was tending to his wound. There was no sign of the other household guards or the Doctor. Nyssa explained all she could about what had happened.

'Who's the boy?' Vollmer asked.

'James Lees,' Nyssa replied. The real James Lees. He went through the rift seven years ago. Time moves differently on the other side, so he grew only a few days older.'

'The Queen - is she safe?'

Morrison nodded as he wrapped a bandage around his leg. 'She's with the Doctor. The others went downstream to search for any survivors. Doulton - the real Doulton - went through to try and bring his men back. But then the waters came..?'

'We could use the diving suit to try to rescue them,' the sergeant suggested.

Nyssa shook her head. 'It was destroyed by the flash flood. The general and his men are trapped on the other side.'

Vollmer digested all of this before speaking again. 'I'll go and help with the search. It seems that's all there is left to do.'

Victoria waited until the Doctor had finished his explanations of all that had happened before speaking. 'A fascinating tale, but I don't know how much of it to believe! She sighed and shook her head. 'We

don't know how much of it to believe' A smile crept across her face. 'Sometimes it can be most vexing remembering where being a monarch stops and the woman begins'

The Doctor nodded. He hesitated before venturing advice to the Queen. 'Your Majesty, what happened here - it can never be spoken of.'

Of course not! They would think me madder than my grandpapa! She looked down at her locket, regarding the tiny portrait inside. 'Do you believe in ghosts, Doctor?'

I like to believe almost anything is possible in heaven and earth, Your Majesty.'

Victoria nodded. 'Have faith and faith shall be given you?'

`Something like that'

`When I collapsed, I fell into a dream. My beloved Albert spoke to me and held me and said goodbye. He said I should find a new happiness' Victoria looked intently at the Doctor. 'Was that real? Was it his ghost or just another illusion, another phantom? I was so certain that Master Lees was speaking in the voice of my late husband but now... I know not what to believe any more.'

`What does your heart tell you?'

The Queen pondered that and then nodded to herself.

`Then let your heart be your guide, ma'am' He bowed to her.

'Now, if you will excuse me, there is one last task I must perform'

* * *

It was nearly dusk when the Doctor emerged from the TARDIS and joined the others by a roaring fire in the centre of the camp. 'Well, the gateway is shut again. The pressure of all that water and debris has blocked the entrance again - for good this time'

`What happened to the soldiers?' James asked sleepily.

He had regained consciousness and appeared remarkably untroubled by his time beyond the rift.

`We found no trace of them downstream,' Vollmer said. He chose not

to tell the boy about the faceless corpses he and the others had recovered from the shoreline. At the Queen's insistence the bodies were to be given proper funerals, as befitted any fallen soldiers.

`There was no way back for Doulton and his men,' the Doctor admitted. 'The general knew that might well happen when he volunteered to go back through the rift and rally his troops. They sacrificed themselves for a greater good. But perhaps their sacrifice will show something of mankind's nobility to those on the other side'

`The general and his troops shall be listed as missing in action, presumed dead,' an imperious voice announced.

`They shall receive funerals with full military honours' The Queen emerged from her tent, ready to depart for Lanark.

Vollmer and the other soldiers saluted. 'Night is fast drawing in. It is time for us all to move on,' she said.

`Your Majesty, Nyssa and I shall not be travelling with you,' the Doctor said. 'Our journey will take a different path'

`Very well,' she replied. 'But you shall continue to be our scientific advisor for as long as you wish, Doctor. It is the least we can do to thank you'

`Thank you, Your Majesty.'

Vollmer let the other soldiers go on ahead with the Queen and James. He waited until the royal entourage was out of earshot before speaking to the Doctor and Nyssa. `Well, I'll be back in the morning with a team of men to tidy everything up and supervise removal of the bodies. Will you still be here?'

`No,' the Doctor replied. 'Our business here is done' He shook the sergeant's hand. 'Goodbye, Vollmer - and good luck for the future'

The soldier rolled his eyes. After this I think army life will be rather boring. It's time I considered a new profession'

`What will happen to James?' Nyssa asked.

Vollmer shrugged. 'We'll try to find his family but heaven knows where they'll be by now Failing that, he can stay with me and Clara for a while. We've always wanted children of our own and I'm starting to think I should be spending more time at home' He nodded to them

both, then went quietly on his way, disappearing into the darkness.

Extract from Observations and Analysis, A Journal:

I waited until we were back in the TARDIS before questioning the Doctor. I knew he had not told the whole truth about the rift.

He admitted using the TARDIS to seal the gateway.

I managed to impose another dimensional buffer over it, a permanent divide this time. That will gradually heal the rift, repairing the weakness in the space-time continuum'

I remembered how slowly time moved on the other side.

'The general and his men could still be alive there, still fighting their battle'

'Yes. For decades yet as time is measured on this world, even centuries. I dare not risk trying to rescue them, in case it reopens the rift. I warned Doultton of the consequences if he got trapped on the other side but he was determined to go back there.'

And his men? What choice did they have, Doctor?'

'We can't save everyone, Nyssa. You of all people should know that by now.'

'Like my father?'

Or Adric. Death comes to us all. Learning to accept our own mortality - that is the greatest lesson.'

I pointed out there was still so much we did not know. How had the rift between worlds first been created? What was the other side like before Earth began to infect it?

The Doctor nodded. 'Perhaps we will never know all the answers' He finished setting the controls for our next journey and looked at me. 'How do you feel?'

The wound in my chest had been healing rapidly since I stepped back through the rift, while my psychic flashes had stopped for the moment. Perhaps it had been my proximity to the doppelganger James and the rift that triggered them.

I realised the Doctor was still waiting for my answer, so I told him

about my final vision from just before the temporary dam was blown apart, of my father saying goodbye. It was different from the others,' I said, 'more real somehow.'

The Doctor walked around the console unit to stand in front of me. 'No, I meant how do you *feel*?' he asked.

I still wasn't convinced by his diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder and told him so. 'Well, one wouldn't want to be right all the time,' he replied. 'It seemed to fit the facts but, as you pointed out, you are not from Earth so there's no reason why such a -'

'I feel better,' I said, cutting him short. 'Thank you.'

The Doctor smiled. 'Good'

'But I wouldn't say no to a hug'

Historical Notes

Empire of Death blends fact and fiction, using real people from the nineteenth century alongside characters created for this novel. A few elements are worthy of clarification.

New Lanark, Corra Linn, Dundaff Linn and Lanark are all real places in Scotland, and their geographical positions and functions used in the book are broadly accurate for the historical period. The dam built between Dundaff and Corra Linn is invention - the River Clyde was not dammed in this area until the twentieth century. The former cotton-milling community of New Lanark is now a World Heritage site and well worth a visit. The Walker brothers were owners of the mills in 1863 but Doctor Robert Kirkhope is fictional.

Corra Linn is Britain's largest waterfall. It inspired many Victorians who visited it, including the poet John Browning and the artist Joseph Turner. Several times a year the river is let loose and the Falls of Clyde can be seen in all their glory.

The sequences set in the Lock may sound like some macabre invention but are based upon historical fact, such as the mercury treatments, and the use of virginal children to 'cure'

men of sexually transmitted diseases. Only the annex to which James is sent is fictional.

James Lees is a fictional character inspired by stories surrounding the spiritualist Robert James Lees. In 1931 his daughter claimed that, while her father was a teenager in 1862 or 1863, he delivered a message from the late Prince Albert. Lees is purported to have conducted séances at Windsor and put Victoria in touch with her husband's spirit, but turned down the chance to become her resident medium. There is no known corroboration for these claims.

Acknowledgements

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The editorial team: Justin, Sarah and Ben.

Love and understanding: Alison, as always.

About the Author

David Bishop is a writer who lives in Scotland. His recent works include the controversial audio drama *Doctor Who Unbound: Full Fathom Five* for Big Finish Productions, the film guide book *Starring Michael Caine* for Reynolds & Hearn and the zombie gulag serial *Dead Men Walking* for 2000 AD. This is his third *Doctor Who* novel for the BBC, following *Amorality Tale* and *The Domino Effect*.

Recently published:

Scream of the Shalka

by Paul Cornell

ISBN 0 563 48619 8

The novelisation of the BBCi broadcast starring Richard E. Grant

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When the Doctor lands his TARDIS in the Lancaster town of Lannet, in

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Already events are mapped out and defined. Already the pieces of the trap are in place. The Council of Eight already knows when Sabbath will betray them. It knows when Fitz will survive the horrors in the Museum of Anthropology. It knows when Trix will come to his help. It knows when the Doctor will finally realise the truth.

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Never.

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And at least one of them will be unable to resist.

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